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NIBBĀNA IN THERAVĀDA PERSPECTIVE WITH SPECIAL
REFERENCE TO BUDDHISM IN BURMA

by

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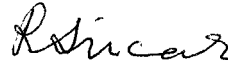
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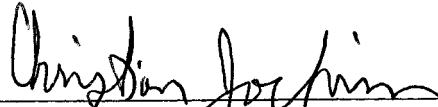
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NIBBĀNA IN THERAVĀDA PERSPECTIVE WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO BUDDHISM IN BURMA

ABSTRACT

This dissertation provides an analytical and critical study of the concept of *Nibbāna* through canonical texts; it explores canonical methods and the meditative developmental process through the systematic methods of Theravāda Buddhist meditation. The primary purpose of this dissertation is to explain the interpretations of *Nibbāna* described and standardized by Buddhist and non-Buddhist scholars and to analyze their perspectives of the way to liberation. Despite the appearance of scholarly interpretations of *Nibbāna* that have frequently occurred in the canonical texts, the exact meaning of *Nibbāna* has not been settled in Buddhism.

The source material for this dissertation mainly deals with the Theravāda Pāli canonical texts in the *Ti-piṭaka* (Three Baskets), its commentaries, and its sub-commentaries. To clarify the meaning of *Nibbāna*, canonical interpretations, meditative methods, experience with Buddhist meditation objects, philosophical methods, and psychological analysis are required in this study. The exploration of *Nibbāna* covers two major aspects: Theoretical *Nibbāna* and practical *Nibbāna*. The former is derived through explanatory principles and the latter is

determined through experiential realization. This dissertation also covers the methods of meditation and the systematic progress of insight wisdom. The author claims that to apply the methods of Buddhist meditation in practice is to obtain the higher level of realization through insight wisdom (*ñāṇa*) and the supramundane path (*lokkutara-magga*). In addition, the author suggests that the study of theories alone is not sufficient to thoroughly comprehend "*Nibbāna*". The practice of mindfulness meditation is necessary in order to realize "*Nibbāna*".

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ABBREVIATIONS

A	Aṭṭhakathā
Ab	Abhidhamma-Piṭaka
Ab-S	Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha
Ab-S-N	Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha nissaya
Ab-T	Abhidhammattha (saṅgaha) vibhāvinī-ṭīkā
Ab-B-T	Abhidhammattha (saṅgaha) bhāsā-ṭīkā
Ac-Ab	A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma by Bhikhu Bodhi
An-N	Āṅguttara-Nikāya (Vols. I, II, III)
Ap	Apadāna
Be	Burmese script edition of Pāli Texts (Burma)
BD	Buddhist Dictionary, by Nyanatiloka
BPS	Buddhist Publication Society (Sri Lanka)
Ch-CD	Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyanā CD-ROM: Version 3
Cu	Cūḷaniddesa
Dha	Dhammapada
Dha-A	Dhammasaṅgani-aṭṭhakathā
Di-N	Dīgha-Nikāya (Vols. I, II, III)
Di-N-NT	A New Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya, WP
G-M-Ni	Gambhīrāgambhīra-Mahānibbuta-Dīpanī

It	Itivuttaka
Ka	Kathāvatthu
Kh-N	Khuddaka-Nikāya
Kh-T	Khuddaka-ṭīkā
Ma-N	Majjhima-Nikāya (Vols. I, II, II)
Ma-N-NT	A New Translation of the Majjhima Nikāya, WP
Ma-P-D	Mahāvagga Pāḷi, Dīgha-Nikāya
Ma-P-V	Mahāvagga Pāḷi, Vinaya Piṭaka
Ne	Netti-Pāḷi
Ni-B-F	Nirvāna and Other Buddhist Felicities
Ni-Di	Nibbāna-Dīpanī
Pa	Parivā- Pāḷi
Pa-ED	Pāḷi English Dictionary, PTS, London, 1986
Pa-Ni	Paradox and Nirvāna
Pat	Paṭisambhidāmagga
PED	Pāḷi English Dictionary (PTS)
PTS	Pāḷi Text Society (Oxford, England)
Pu	Puggalapaññatti-Pāḷi
Q-Mi	Question of King Milinda (Translation of <i>Milinda-paññā</i> , Be)
Sa-N	Saṃyutta-Nikāya (Vols. I, II, III)
Sa-N-NT	A New Traslation of the Saṃyutta Nikāya Vols. I & II, WP

T	Ṭikā
Ud	Udāna-Pāḷi
Vi-M	Visuddhimagga (Vols. I & II, Be)
Vi-M-Tran	The Path of Purification, BPS
Vi-P	Vinaya-Piṭaka (Vols. I, II, III, IV, V)
Vim	Translation of Vimuttimaggā, BPS
WP	Wisdom Publication (Boston)

Note: References to volumes and pages of *Pāḷi* texts and *Pāḷi* commentaries are to Burmese script editions (Be).

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This study is an exploration of the Buddhist concept of *Nibbāna* and its former interpretations. There are some critical issues that have arisen from its former interpretations. From the theoretical and practical perspectives, my study focuses on the former interpretations of *Nibbāna* applying the relevant methods to this inquiry. The study sets out a brief outline of historical, textual, and methodological contexts for exploring the meaning of *Nibbāna* in Pāli, *Nirvāna* in Sanskrit with reference to Pāli and Burmese literature. The essential part of this work reexamines the interpretations of *Nibbāna* with reference to the canonical texts, commentaries and sub-commentaries, especially with special reference to Theravāda Buddhism in Burma. Yet some formulations from the West's acquaintance with Buddhism are also put into this study as an additional value. The aim of this study is to explore the textual meaning of *Nibbāna* from the practical or experiential viewpoint. The theoretical basis will also be discussed. Moreover, this study will analyze scholarly interpretations of early Buddhist texts and perspectives of Buddhist and non-Buddhist scholars.

In fact, the historical scholarly interpretations are not sufficient enough to understand what the meaning of *Nibbāna* is clearly. One reason is a limitation

of the languages that they use and the second reason is that probably the writers themselves have insufficient practice of interpreting in order to clarify the meaning of *Nibbāna*. And no Buddhist tradition draws a definite conclusion for the meaning of *Nibbāna*. Since no single solution is found universally within the Buddhist tradition with regard to a common perspective of *Nibbāna*, even within the same religious tradition, there is even less to say about what other religions consider *Nibbāna* to be. However, this study will explore previous scholarly interpretations of *Nibbāna* as well as canonical interpretations of *Nibbāna* to clarify what is *Nibbāna*. Since the interpretations of *Nibbāna* are not clear enough to determine what *Nibbāna* truly means, some non-Buddhist scholars attempted to interpret *Nibbāna* as 'annihilationism.' The non-Buddhist scholar Max Muller (1823-1900) interpreted *Nibbāna* as "utter annihilation." He indicated that *Nibbāna* was nothing more than absolute extinction.¹ However, the doctrine of annihilation was not the original purpose of Buddhism. His view was considered to be very negative to Buddhism.

Unlike Max Muller, the Buddhist scholar, La Vallee Poussin (1866-1962) wrote: "We must confess that this identification, '*Nirvāna* = annihilation' is not one of the 'primordial' doctrines of Buddhism. The doctrine of annihilation was not an original 'purpose'; it was a result. That is to say, Sakyamuni (or the Church) did not start with such an idea of deliverance; this idea had been forced upon him (or upon them) because he had been rash enough to deny the existence

of a soul."² Poussin found the misinterpretation of *Nibbāna* as "utter annihilation" in the previous work and insisted that *Nirvāna* was considered to be a "blissful paradise" from the perspective of the practicing Buddhists. Yet there is nothing equal to describing *Nibbāna* adequately according to Poussin. He emphasized the view of *Nibbāna* as follows:

We believe that the most exact and the most authoritative definition of *Nirvāna* is not annihilation, but "unqualified deliverance," a deliverance of which we have no right to predicate anything.³

Poussin's analysis showed that for the original Indian Buddhism, the solution for the meaning of *Nibbāna* did not depend on conception or theoretical reflection, but depended on the practical approach as being necessary for this solution. He confidently stated, "The study of *Nirvāna* does not depend on its solution. Without taking part in the controversy which this problem raised, we can easily construct a reasonable idea of the probable history of *Nirvāna*."⁴ Like Poussin, Theodore Stcherbatsky (1866-1942) was a Buddhist scholar, but his name may not be familiar to Western European audiences. However, Western scholars acknowledge his analytical and intellectual views. His criticisms are found in his work, *The Conception of Buddhist Nirvāna*. His emphasis is that "the aim of Buddhism as a method of salvation is conceived to be the suppression of the process, a process of successive *dharma* moments. The famous Buddhist equation, existence equals sorrow (*dukkha*), which had seemed dubiously synthetic to most Western interpreters, becomes at best a tautology in

Stcherbatsky's treatment, since he translates *dukkha* not as 'sorrow' but as

'unrest'.⁵ Regarding the word *Nibbāna*, Poussin perceptively said as follows:

Indians do not make a clear distinction between facts and ideas, between ideas and words; they have never clearly recognized the principle of contradiction. Buddhist dialectic has a four-branched dilemma: *Nirvāna* is existence or non-existence or both existence and non-existence or neither existence nor non-existence.⁶

In this regard, one might argue about the word *Nibbāna* from the point of view of metaphysics. Is the phrase, "*Nibbāna* does not exist" a negation? In reality, it is not so, because the original purpose of Buddhism is not a negation.

Bibhuni S. Yadav⁷ argued,

Metaphysics is a methodological fantasy, a tool to confuse the wish 'Being be' with the claim that 'Being is.' . . . Metaphysical thinking involves the logic of 'is' (*asti*) and 'not-is' (*nāsatī*); its argument being that something either exists or it does not.⁸

There is no doubt; since the concept of *Nibbāna* consists of an ambiguous meaning as in the phrase, "it exists and it does not exist," it cannot be easily understood as either "This meaning" or "That meaning." Thus, the elusive meaning of *Nibbāna* generated skeptical doubts for non-Buddhist scholars in early Buddhist thought.

The modern Buddhist scholar, Steven Collins, the author of several books including *Nirvāna and other Buddhist Felicities*, attempts to interpret the meaning of *Nibbāna* in a different way. However, Collins does not attempt to resolve the views of eternalism and annihilationism. He views the concept of

Nibbāna as imaginary *Nibbāna*, that is, he is disposed to use the metaphor of *Nibbāna* as a city. He also points out the state of *Nibbāna* as a transcendental vision, a Buddhist soteriology, and the ultimate attainment in Buddhism.⁹

To non-Buddhist thought, *Nibbāna* seems to be a mystical doctrine of Indian Buddhism, also known as early Buddhism. However, Buddhism spread from Asia to the West, because of its logical doctrines, its moral ethics, and its goal. As matter of fact, the meaning of *Nibbāna* is critical to Buddhist and non-Buddhists scholars and difficult to ascertain due to ambiguous interpretations. For this reason, in the study of Buddhist traditions there is a need to balance between the meaning of the written texts and the meaning of the living expression, which deals with one's own experience. It is believed that discussing with limited interpretations can generate more skeptical doubt. From the perspective of Buddhist practice, skeptical doubt (*vicikicchā*) can become a hindrance that obstructs the progress of insight wisdom (*vipassanā-ñāṇa*).¹⁰

In daily life, however, people have to use languages for communication. Otherwise one cannot explain the experience of something without language. We need words to communicate about such things as taste, feeling, emotion, happiness and so on. However, it is impossible to describe the meaning of *Nibbāna* with mere words. This is because a language is itself considered to be just a name. It is said that a name is a mere concept. Indeed, the ultimate truth has no name. The taste of the *Dhamma* and the essence of *Nibbāna* are beyond

languages, since they are considered to be ultimate realities. As a matter of fact, reality has no name and no language in accordance with Buddhist perspectives.¹¹

With regard to reality, it is understood that there is no way to describe the true meaning of experiences with mere words, such as technical names for practical experiences. Only a person who has had the experience personally in that field really understands the words. Such an example is the word *Nibbāna*, which has been realized by only enlightened beings (*Arahanta* in Pāḷi, *Yahantā*, in Burmese) who have reached a transcendental state (*lokuttara-citta*). Yet one can obtain the transcendent experience through supramundane wisdom or enlightenment (*arahatta-magga-phala-ñāṇa*) that is linked to intensive meditation, but not by mere thinking or speculating.¹² Perhaps, one can interpret what *Nibbāna* means theoretically based on a philosophical perspective. Yet it is impossible to realize what *Nibbāna* really means through philosophical definitions, unless one has practiced insight (*vipassanā*) meditation, also called "Mindfulness Meditation" (*satipaṭṭhāna-bhāvanā*) in accordance with the *Mahā-satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*. Regarding this context, the statement reads as follows:

*Yo hi koci bhikkhave ime cattāro satipaṭṭhāne evaṃ bhāveyya
sattavassāni ... sattāhaṃ. tassa dvinnarī phalānarī aññatararī phalarī
pātikaṅkham diṭṭheva dhamme aññā vā upādisese anāgāmitā.*¹³

Whoever, monks, should practice these "Four Foundations of Mindfulness" for just seven years . . . just one week may expect one of two results: either an Arahantship in this life or, if there should be some substance left, the state of a Non-Returner.¹⁴

Moreover, no single expression in any language can fully cover the true meaning of *Nibbānic* experience without practice. The mere interpretations sometimes mislead readers to absorb different meanings. In fact, it is necessary to balance the tension between limited interpretation and unlimited self-realization, when one applies a language to the Buddhist concept of *Nibbāna*. To establish the essential teaching of the Buddha with proper interpretations, this research will emphasize what was the original message of *Nibbāna* in accordance with the Pāḷi canonical texts. First, it will investigate the historical development of early Buddhist texts. Secondly, it will focus on textual methods or canonical methods that often apply Buddhist texts to relevant interpretations of the original teachings of the Buddha and philosophical methods as well. Lastly, it will focus on the mindfulness method, which directly applies the progress of meditation in order to understand what is the meaning of *Nibbāna*.

As has been mentioned before, this study will strictly confine itself to the original works, that is, the Pāḷi Canon and its commentaries, including Burmese Buddhist literature. Among the Burmese literary works, this study will mainly use two books: *Gambhīrāgambhīra Mahānibbūta-dīpanī-kyam*, written by Shwe Kyin Sayādaw and *Nibbāna-Dīpanī*, written by Ledi Sayādaw. These sources are based on the original sources of Pāḷi texts and commentaries in Theravāda Buddhism.

Historical Foundations of Early Buddhism

Buddhism originally started in India after the teachings of the Buddha inspired his disciples. For this reason, original Buddhism was named as "Indian Buddhism." At the beginning, Buddhism was unique and harmonized. But, after about a hundred years, the religious movement divided into various schools. This was brought about by the passage of time, different environments, and different cultural traditions. Since then, there has been no universal agreement among the Buddhist teachings, including what the meaning of *Nibbāna* is and what the goal of Buddhism is.

According to Hirakawa Akira, there were initially twelve schools of the Theravāda lineage in Indian Buddhism.¹⁵ There were also additionally different authorities among the Theravāda traditions. However, this study will not pay any attention to describing each school's origin, since it is impossible to give an account of all the different schools of the Theravāda tradition. That is beyond the scope of this sort of study. The study recognizes that among the Theravāda traditions, Sthaviravadin school became a major school for Theravāda tradition in accordance with what P. V. Bapat says in the book, *2500 Years of Buddhism*. And the Theravādin schools used Pāḷi as a sacred or canonical language for their tradition. "The earliest available teaching of the Buddha to be found in Pāḷi literature belongs to the school of the Theravādins, who may be called the most orthodox school of Buddhism."¹⁶ In the context of Theravāda Buddhism,

Burmese Buddhism is considered to be in the lineage of the Theravāda tradition. According to the Ceylonese (Sri Lankan) Chronicles, two Buddhist monks, named Venerable Sona and Venerable Uttara were sent by King Ashoka (Asoka in Pāli) to preach Buddhism in *Suvarna-bhūmi* (*Suvaṇṇa-bhūmi*, in Pāli) which is generally identified with Burma (Myanmar).¹⁷ During King Asoka's time (third century BCE), Buddhist missionary works were extended to countries including Sri Lanka, Burma and Thailand. The historical context of Buddhism in Burma is described as follows:

The earliest evidence of Theravāda Buddhism in Burma (*Suvaṇṇa-bhūmi*) is an inscription in Pāli dating from about the 5th century C.E. Although Mahāyāna and Tantric Buddhism were popular at one time in Burma, King Anawratha converted to Theravāda in the 11th century C.E. Within two centuries, it became the more widely practiced form of Buddhism (in Burma).¹⁸

Based on this, there is no doubt that in the present age the Theravāda Buddhism of Burma comes from the lineage of Theravāda Indian Buddhism originally. Buddhist Scholars assume that the oldest original records of the Buddha's teachings are written in the Pāli language. This language is related to the language of Māgadhi, which was probably spoken in central India, known as Māgadha-raṭṭha (Māgadha country) at the Buddha's time, around 500 B.C.E. There is no direct indication to point out the link between Pāli and Māgadhi language. However, Buddhist scholars assume that at the time of Buddha, people who lived in Māgadha spoke the language of Māgadhi, which was the origin of

Pāli language. According to Burmese-Pāli Dictionary Vol. xvi, 536., *Māgadha-bhāsā* (language) has been recognized as *Pāli-bhāsā*:

*Suddhamāgadhikāti magadhesu bhavā tattha veditā vā magadhā, saddā. Te etesanti, tesu vā niyuttāti māgadhikā.*¹⁹

Suddhamāgadhā means the language has been named as Māgadhi, because it originally started in Māgadha and people who lived there spoke the language. The language of Māgadha grammatically becomes "Māgadhi."²⁰

In the historical context, the Buddhist Council was held near Rājagaha city, in the Māgadha country. The council members officially used Pāli language. The language probably had two different names, Māgadhi and Pāli, but the origin of the language would be the same.

In the Sangha Council, members of Sangha especially used the name "Theravāda." Why did the Sangha use that name? In Pāli language, the word Theravāda literally means "Way of the Elders" or "Doctrine of the Elders." In reality, the Buddha first uttered these teachings, and the elders just repeated and protected the original doctrines of the Buddha. Thus, the teachings were named as "the Doctrine of the Elders." The Pāli scriptures make up a vast number of texts. Theravāda Buddhists refer to the doctrines as the '*Ti-piṭaka*' (Three Baskets): *Katham piṭakavasena tividham. Sabbampi cetam vinayapiṭakam, suttantapiṭakam, abhidhammapiṭakamti tippabhedameva hoti*; [What are the three types of *piṭaka* (baskets)? They are *Vinaya-piṭaka* (the Basket of Discipline),

Suttanta-piṭaka (the Basket of Doctrines) and *Abhidhamma-piṭaka* (the Basket of Philosophy)].²¹

There were many sects in Buddhism within Theravāda and Mahāyāna traditions. Yet it goes beyond the scope of this study to describe the differences between the lineage of Theravāda Schools as well as Mahāyāna Schools in detail. However, the classification of traditions into two fundamental groups is regularly used in this study. They are: Pāli tradition (Pāli Buddhism) and Sanskrit tradition (Sanskrit Buddhism). Pāli Buddhism, also known as Theravāda Buddhism includes Southern Buddhist traditions including those of Sri Lanka, Burma (Myanmar), Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos, while Sanskrit Buddhism, also called Mahāyāna Buddhism includes Northern Buddhist traditions such as those of China, Tibet, Nepal, Bhutan, Korea, Japan, Taiwan, and Vietnam. This study will mainly emphasize the viewpoint of Pāli Buddhism. The reason is that the researcher has received proper training together with study and practice under Theravāda Buddhism in Burma, since he was nine years old. The researcher has expertise as a *vipassanā* (insight) meditation teacher in his religious life and the *vipassanā* tradition, more specifically Mahāsi tradition, which he follows, is linked to Pāli Buddhism.

In Theravāda Buddhist context, the first and the most essential Buddhist teaching of early Buddhism is "The Four Noble Truths" as taught by the Buddha in the *Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta*. In this *Sutta*, one of the essential messages

of the Buddha is *Dukkha-nirodha-saccā*, which is relatively synonymous with the word *Nibbāna*.²² The word *Nirodha* or *Nibbāna* is every now and then described in Pāli canonical texts as well as in Buddhist literature. Later on, the Buddha more often used the word *Nibbāna*. In the *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta* the Buddha directly used the word *Nibbāna*.

*Ekāyano ayaṃ bhikkhave maggo sattānaṃ visuddhiyā sokaparidevānaṃ samatikkamāya dukkhadomanassānaṃ atthagamāya nāyassa adhigamāya nibbānassa sacchikiriyāya, yadidaṃ cattāro satipaṭṭhānā.*²³

There is, monks, this one way to the purification of beings, for the overcoming of sorrow and distress, for the disappearance of pain and sadness, for the gaining of the right path, for the realization of *Nibbāna*: that is to say the four foundations of mindfulness.²⁴

In a similar way, the word, *Nibbāna* can be found more than six hundred times in the Pāli Canon, which contains forty volumes, excluding commentaries and sub-commentaries. In terms of *Nibbāna*, Pāli Buddhism sometimes describes *Nibbāna* as final liberation, that is, *vimutti-dhamma* (liberation from all sufferings).²⁵

The concept of *Nibbāna*, however, has endured through every historical account of the various Buddhist traditions. There is no doubt that the passage of time has produced many concepts of *Nibbāna* and the word "ultimate reality." In this regard, one can argue that the significant statements of the original teachings of the Buddha have been weakened due to different times and different settings of the different Buddhist traditions. From time to time,

concepts of *Nibbāna*, that is, the unchanging reality, have changed depending on scholarly interpretations and the different perspectives of Buddhist traditions.

A glance at the long history of Buddhism shows that, because of different interpretations of Buddhist doctrines and disagreement with early Buddhist views, new forms of Buddhism deviated from the early interpretations of the teachings of the Buddha. One new form of Buddhism was known as Mahāyāna Buddhism.²⁶ Scholars in Mahāyāna Buddhism, or Sanskrit Buddhism, disagree with some views of the early Buddhist doctrines. Nāgarjuna was a Buddhist scholar in the Mahāyāna tradition.²⁷ He described *Nibbāna* from a different position. According to his view, *Nirvāna* (*Nibbāna*) is *saṃsāra* and *saṃsāra* is *Nirvāna*. They are not different from one another and they are not two entities in an experience. In reality, these two things are the same. Moreover, he also interpreted *Nirvāna* as *śūnyatā* (emptiness). According to him, all things are empty and beings and non-beings are also empty. Emptiness is understood as the middle way. The way of emptiness is considered to be the way of *Nirvāna*.²⁸

Based on further disagreement with some interpretations of *Nibbāna* in the tradition, another new sect of Mahāyāna Buddhism emerged. This form of Mahāyāna Buddhism was known as Pure Land Buddhism.²⁹ Pure Land tradition equates *Nirvāna* with "the Realm of Bliss or the Buddha-realm." Pure Land is the result of the accumulated merit of the *Bodhisattva Dharmakara*, who

practiced for eons before becoming the Buddha Amitābhā. The tradition emphasizes that the Sakyamuni Buddha's *Dharmakāya* (the body of essence) is indeed eternal and everlasting.³⁰ The emphasis of Pure Land Buddhism is that the eternal Buddha theoretically has three bodies (*trikāya*) as manifestations. This view is linked to Asnga's theory and other Yogācāra masters' views.

The Buddha body is 'numerically single but functionally multiple'. In early Mahāyāna thought Buddha was seen as having a twofold body, namely, the Dharma body (*dharmakāya*), which is formless, absolute, real; and the Form body (*rupakāya*), which, colorful and tangible, is accessible to the senses. Asnga and other Yogācāra masters subsequently held that Buddha has a threefold body: the *Dharma* body (*Dharmakāya*); the Enjoyment body (*Sambhogakāya*); and the manifestation body (*Nirmānakāya*).³¹

Based on the above statement, Pure Land Buddhists postulate that although the historical Buddha exists no longer in the human realm, the body of bliss eternally exists in the highest heaven called the realm of Buddhas. In this context, the Buddha's *Dharma body*, according to Pure Land Buddhism, is likely to be eternal and everlasting.

In light of this historical context, one might view Buddhism, including both Theravāda Buddhism and Mahāyāna Buddhism, as a view of negation, unless one develops *vipassanā-ñāṇa* (insight wisdom). However, there are philosophical methods in this regard to help us explore the various interpretations of *Nibbāna*, grounded in canonical Buddhist texts. These methods include the textual methods (canonical methods) and some philosophical

methods. The use of philosophical methods helps viewers broaden clear comprehension of the concept of *Nibbāna*, while the use of textual methods helps practitioners understand the significance of *maggā-phala-ñāṇa* (enlightenment or path and fruition knowledge). To be specific, using these philosophical methods, as well as textual methods, may help this study clarify the two extreme views: annihilationism (*uccheda-diṭṭhi*) and eternalism (*sassata-diṭṭhi*).

Methodological Context for the Study of *Nibbāna*

As the historical context has been mentioned with different perspectives of the Buddhist traditions, it is clear that the mere historical context is not sufficient enough to examine the meaning of *Nibbāna*. There is a need to attempt a reappraisal of a number of interpretations. Previous works of interpretation are more often contradictory than complimentary of the Buddha's original message. To strengthen the work of interpretations, this study applies methods including textual methods (canonical methods) as well as philosophical methods for setting up the investigation of early Buddhist thought.

What does the textual method mean? It means that the method has been often used in Pāli texts. In Pāli Buddhism, textual methods involve a division of three aspects: (1) theoretical text (*pariyatti*), (2) practical text (*paṭipatti*), and (3) experimental text (*paṭiveda*). The theoretical text here means a method that

describes theories of doctrines in accordance with the teachings of the Buddha, while the practical text is to apply the theories of doctrines as an essential guideline in order to obtain mental and spiritual development and to understand what *Nibbāna* really means. The experimental text refers to the experience of meditation including tranquility (*samatha*) meditation and insight (*vipassanā*) meditation. Of the three aspects, the theoretical text is considered to be the essential text for Buddhism. This is because based on the theoretical text, Buddhist practitioners can fulfill the other two in their spiritual path.³²

*Tattha pariyattī-ti tīṇi piṭakāni. paṭipattī-ti paṭipadā. paṭivedo-ti saccappativedho. Sāsanaṭṭhitiyā pana pariyatti pamāṇaṇi. paṇḍito hi te piṭakam sutvā dvepi pūreti.*³³

Pariyatti here means *Ti-piṭaka* (Three Baskets). *Paṭipatti* means practice. And *paṭiveda* means the realization of *saccā* (truths), that is, the "Four Noble Truths." Of the three texts, *pariyatti* text (theoretical text) is more fundamental and essential than the other two. While studying the fundamental theories, the wise is able to fulfill the other two.³⁴

As has been seen the significance of the canonical methods, the textual methods are applicable for this research in order to explore the meaning of *Nibbāna*. In terms of the realization of the truth, the experience of practice contains the experience of *Jhāna* (absorption) and the experience of *Ñāṇa* (insight wisdom) including insight knowledge (*vipassanā-ñāṇa*) as well as path and fruition knowledge (*magga-phala-ñāṇa*).³⁵

It is, however, necessary for this study to select some appropriate philosophical methods in order to interpret Buddhist texts by means of

systematic units. In this work, the methods of hermeneutics and pragmatism can be applied. The method of hermeneutics is concerned with human understanding in the interpretation of religious texts. It was originally concerned more narrowly with interpreting sacred texts. However, "hermeneutics" is frequently used today in the fields of Biblical studies, religious studies, and philosophy. It became an essentially philosophical position in the twentieth century regarding modern theories of interpretation as well as a philosophical tradition with the work of Friedrich Schleiermacher. Moreover, the "hermeneutics circle," first developed by Steffen Schleiermacher, is the process by which one returns to a text and generates a new interpretation; perhaps it is a new interpretation every time.³⁶ Yet current interest in hermeneutics is concerned with more modern theories of interpretation. To interpret religious texts, "Buddhist hermeneutics" also deal with the interpretation of their scriptures.³⁷

Seeking to determine this final view became an overriding concern in Buddhist hermeneutics, and it is not surprising that the doctrine of upāya, of the Buddha's skillful methods in teaching the doctrine, which caused such problems in the interpretation of scripture should itself become a principle by which that interpretation was undertaken. Upāya also seems to form the basis of textual taxonomies that are as ostensibly disparate as those set forth in the Theravāda *Netti Pakarana* and Kūkai's *Jūjūshinron*. . . . The Theravādin exegetes based their hermeneutical strategy on the idea of a gradual path to enlightenment. Hence they delineated a typology of persons, based on factors such as level of spiritual development and temperament, to whom the Buddha addressed his teaching.³⁸

In terms of the issue of interpretations, since the Buddha did not teach the same thing to all his disciples, Buddhists have to use various methods to interpret the meaning of *Nibbāna* in order to obtain the relevant meanings in a particular text. Thus the Buddhist hermeneutic method is relevant to this research paper to analyze the previous works of the interpretation of *Nibbāna*.

To sum up, seeing some interpretations that have been done in former works, the methodological circle of interpretation cannot be escaped. In the method of the hermeneutic circle, the circularity of interpretation relates between the parts and the whole. This means that the interpretation of each part is dependent on the interpretation of the whole. It is truly useful for this study, because interpretations are sometimes very complicated due to their multiplicity of layers of meanings and concerns. Thus hermeneutic method is reliable for this study to reach its goal.

This study also applies pragmatism. Pragmatism was originally developed in the United States. This method holds that the meaning or the truth of ideas must be a function of a practical outcome. "The term *practical* meant *the way thought works in action*."³⁹ Pragmatism develops its method as a theory of truth. Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914) defines pragmatism as a method of clarifying conceptions. For him, the basic principle of pragmatism is to put conceptions to an experimental test and to observe consequences. Peirce postulated that all thinking is considered to be a way of doing something. But

one must have a belief; a belief turns into thought. Only thought that is tested by the criteria of experience and experiment could provide one with the belief to establish one's habit of action.⁴⁰

William James (1842-1910) offers his view that true ideas are useful for the experimental test. James said, "Pragmatism is a method only. . . . Although pragmatism stands for no particular results, as a method in practice its essence is precisely to assure *results*."⁴¹ Thus, this study will involve practical consequences through the pragmatic test including the test of theories, doctrines and interpretations. This method is also practically useful to define the meaning of *Nibbāna* applying the pragmatic test and practical consequences. By applying the textual methods as well as the philosophical methods in this research, this study fulfills its goal with an evaluation of *Nibbāna*. That is the aim of this work.

The Outline of This Research

Regarding the issue of interpretations of *Nibbāna*, early Buddhist thought is primarily concerned with the significance of *Nibbāna* through personal experience that is gained from insight meditation. Nevertheless this research attempts to work for clarification of the meaning of *Nibbāna* based on the Pāli Buddhist (Theravāda Buddhist) perspective. The personal experience of *Nibbāna* is indescribable and it is impossible to define its essence with an exact meaning.

However, with reliable sources it is possible to explore its logical meaning based on textual and philosophical methods. As has been mentioned before, the most reliable sources, for this research, are the Pāli canon, its commentaries, Buddhist literature, and Burmese Buddhist literature.

This chapter briefly outlines how to investigate the textual meanings of *Nibbāna*. Chapter 2 focuses on points of literature reviews based on Pāli canonical literature and historical writings, which deal with early Buddhism, and Buddhist and non-Buddhist scholarly interpretations. Pāli literature is an essential tool for this research in order to get a direct link with the teachings of the Buddha. The literary view mainly deals with canonical texts and Buddhist scholarly interpretations of *Nibbāna*. In this chapter, modern Buddhist and non-Buddhist scholars' perspectives are also taken into account.

Chapter 3 explores the views of existence and non-existence based on the concepts of *kamma* (*karma* in Sanskrit), and *saṃsāra* together with the perspective of Buddhist cosmology. In the canonical contexts, Buddhist texts clearly describe the view of Buddhist cosmology, which deals with the idea of *saṃsāra* and *Nibbāna*. The objective of describing Buddhist cosmology in Buddhist texts is to explain and understand the process of life and death, and existence and non-existence. Buddhists believe that enlightened beings know how beings exist in *saṃsāra* and how beings eradicate the sufferings of *saṃsāra*. In this chapter, the theory of *Abhidhamma* is used to explain the processes of

the various types of consciousness and mental states in relationship to *saṃsāra*, as shown in Buddhist cosmology, and to *Nibbāna*.

Chapter 4 attempts to inquire into the different interpretations of Pāli scholars and their philosophical point of views. This research paper definitely reflects their interpretations and their views. The word *Nibbāna* may have many meanings or many views due to different traditional backgrounds. Yet each tradition has its own values based upon its traditional doctrines. One task of this study is to understand the different perspectives of scholars and to explain how Pāli literature attempts to define the meaning of *Nibbāna*. This study also adds the views of different scholars, which are related to the philosophical conceptions of *Nibbāna*. Indeed, a comparison of different views of Buddhist scholars can lead to broader perspectives for comparative Buddhism.

Chapter 5 mainly emphasizes the practical exercise of applying the method of the "Four Foundation of Mindfulness Meditation," also known as "insight" (*vipassanā*) meditation. The method, originally prescribed by the Buddha, is the path of the progress of insight (*vipassanā-ñāṇa*). However, an exegetic work done by the commentator, Buddhaghosa, who lived in the fifth century A.D., describes the method of mindfulness with systematic, elaborative, narrative, and comprehensive comments in more detail. He carefully analyzes the mindfulness method with categories, similes, stages and clear perspectives. Some of the important texts are *Visuddhimagga* (Path of Purification) and

Mahāvagga-aṭṭhagathā (the commentary of *Mahāsatipatṭhāna-Sutta*). These texts are very important for meditators to understand the right way for their spiritual path. The method of mindfulness meditation will be mainly discussed in Chapter 5.

Regarding the issue of interpretations of *Nibbāna*, this researcher assumes that mere scholarly interpretations are not sufficient enough to understand the meaning of *Nibbāna*, but both theory and practical experience must be considered and applied as well. From the theoretical viewpoint, first of all, what is *Nibbāna*?

CHAPTER 2

THE CONCEPT OF *NIBBĀNA* FROM DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES

Etymology of the Word *Nibbāna*

The term '*Nibbāna*' which occurs in the Pāḷi Canon and its commentaries has been considered as difficult to interpret. Pāḷi commentators and Buddhist and non-Buddhist scholars have given their definition of *Nibbāna* to a variety of audiences who are curious to know what is *Nibbāna*. However, their definitions and interpretations raise many divergent conclusions. This is one reason why this study attempts to analyze a number of interpretations of the scholars in order to make the concept of *Nibbāna* less contradictory and generate a more complimentary definition of the term. Yet this study may result in conclusions that are not always in harmony with all Buddhist traditions.

To know more about the fundamental teachings of the Buddha and interpretations of *Nibbāna*, it is impossible to ignore the structure of Buddhist literature and its significance, rather than dismissing Buddhism as a concept of pessimism. The canonical texts contain clarification of Buddhist views; when the concept of *Nibbāna* began and how it is recognized for its significance. Without awareness of this, there is no doubt that there may well be many questions about the doctrine of *Nibbāna*.

In the *Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha*, *Nibbāna* has been described as one of the four *paramattha-dhammas* (ultimate realities). The word *paramattha* is a combination of the two words: *parama* + *attha*. *Parama* literally means ultimate, highest, final; *attha* means reality, and *dhamma* means quality, nature or thing. Thus *paramattha-dhammas* are things or nature that exist with their own intrinsic nature (*sabhāva*). These things are the final, irreducible components of existence. According to the *Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha*, *paramattha-dhammas* consist of four components: *citta* (consciousness), *cetasika* (mental factors), *rūpa* (matter), and *Nibbāna* (*Nibban* in Burmese). Of the four, the first three realities are conditioned and the fourth reality is unconditioned. This means that *Nibbāna* does not include the conditioned existence, since it is the state of final deliverance from the suffering of existences.⁴² In the *Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha*, four types of *paramattha-dhamma* are recorded.

*Iti cittam cetasikaṃ, rūpaṃ nibbāna-miccapi
paramattham pakāśenti, catudhāva tathāgatā.*⁴³

Thus as fourfold the Tathāgatas (Buddhas) reveal the ultimate reality: Consciousness, mental factors, matter, and *Nibbāna*.⁴⁴

According to Buddhist texts, *Nibbāna* has only one essence or only one intrinsic nature. This means *tadetam sabhāvato ekavidhampi* -- there is only one characteristic of *Nibbāna*. What is the essential quality of *Nibbāna*? This is:

Santi-lakkhanam Nibbānam, which means, "*Nibbāna* is absolute peace or unconditional peace."⁴⁵

However, there are essentially two types of *Nibbāna* in the *Itivuttaka Pāḷi*, *Khuddaka-nikāya*. The statement reads: *Dvemā bhikkhave nibbānadhātuyo. Katamā dve? Saupādisesā ca nibbānadhātu anupādisesā ca nibbānadhātu* (Bhikkhus, there are these two *Nibbāna*-elements [*Nibbāna-dhātu*]. What are the two? They are: (1) *Sa-upādisesa Nibbāna-dhātu* [*Nibbāna-element*] with residue left and (2) *An-upādisesa Nibbāna-dhātu* (the *Nibbāna-element* with no residue left).⁴⁶ This means that *Sa-upādisesa Nibbāna* is a kind of experience of psychological liberation. It is the release from suffering due to defilement in the person's lifetime. *An-upādisesa Nibbāna* is another kind of experience of biological liberation. It is release from all sufferings that are linked to the five aggregates (corporeality, feeling, perception, mental-formation, and consciousness) after entering the state of *Nibbāna*.

The word *Nibbāna* occasionally occurs in the Pāḷi Canon, but its Pāḷi meanings are varied. According to PTS Dictionary, the word *Nirvāna* with its root words, '*nir + vā*' was already in use in the Vedic period. The meaning is "to blow" or "to put out" or "extinguish." However, the application to the extinguishing of fire, that is, worldly "fires" of greed, hatred, and delusion is the prevailing Buddhist conception of the term. The word *Nibbāna* is a Pāḷi form that is derived from a verb "*Nibbanti*". The word "*Nibbanti*" appears in the *Ratana Sutta*, Kh-N; *nibbanti dhirā yathāyaṃ padīpo* (the wise go out, as if the lamp burns out). It means "to be extinguished" or "to be blown out." In this

context, *Nibbāna* signifies the extinguishing of the worldly "fires" of greed, hatred, and delusion.⁴⁷

Etymologically, the word *Nibbāna* is a combination of the two words: *Ni*+*vāna* in Pāli language. *Ni* here means "negation of", or "departure from" (*nikkhamtattā*), and *vāna* means "craving". In *Abhidhammattha vibhāvinī līkā*, the statement reads: *vānasankhātāya taṇhāya nikkhamtattā* [departure from *vāna* or *taṇhā* (craving)].⁴⁸ This means "departure from *vāna* or *taṇhā* (craving)." The combination of the two words "*ni*+*vāna*" means "departure from craving." According to Pāli grammatical form, before the word *vāna* another word *va* is grammatically combined with it. And the word *vāna* becomes a combination word, *va* + *vāna* = *vvāna*. Then the word *vvāna* becomes *bbāna* grammatically. Thus it is understood that the word *ni* + *bbāna* becomes the formal Pāli word *Nibbāna*. It means departure from *vāna* (craving).⁴⁹

However, in the doctrine of the "Four Noble Truths," the Buddha stated that *nirodha-saccā* (the Truth of the Cessation of Sufferings) is the Third Noble Truth, which is considered to have the same meaning as *Nibbāna*, recorded in the *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, Di-N. The statement reads as follows:

*Katamaṇca bhikkhave dukkhanirodham ariyasaccam. yo tassāyeva taṇhāya asesavirāga-nirodho cāgo paṭinissaggo mutti anālayo. . . . etthesā taṇhā pahīyamānā pahīyati. ettha nirujjhamānā nirujjhati. idam vuccati bhikkhave dukkhanirodham ariyasaccam.*⁵⁰

What, monks, is the Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering? It is the complete fading-away and extinction of this craving, its forsaking and

abandonment, liberation from it, detachment from it. . . . and there this craving comes to an end, there its cessation comes about. And that, monks, is called the Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering.⁵¹

In this textual context, according to the commentary of the *Mahāvagga Pāḷi*, Di-N, the word *nirodha* is synonymous with the word *Nibbāna*. In the state of *Nibbāna*, *taṇhā* (craving) has completely ceased. Thus, the word *Nibbāna* is understood to have the same meaning with *Nirodha* in this case. The Pāḷi statement reads as follows: *asesavirāganirodho-ti-ādīni sabbāni nibbānavevacanāneva. nibbānañhi āgamma taṇhā asesā virajjati nirujjhati*; (the words, *asesavirāga* and *nirodha* are synonymous with the word *Nibbāna*; craving (*taṇhā*) has completely ceased, depending on *Nibbāna*).⁵² Therefore, it is said that the word *nirodha* has the same meaning as *Nibbāna* in the context of *Nirodha-saccā*.

No matter what names or synonyms are employed, the essence of *Nibbāna* is only one, that is, *santi-lakkhana* (absolute peace). Yet the word *Nibbāna* can have many names: for example, *asesavirāga* (complete cessation of craving), *asesanirodha* (extinction of craving), *cāga* (forsaking), *paṭinissagga* (abandonment), *mutti* (liberation), *anālaya* (detachment), *rāgakkhaya* (extinction of lust), *dosakkhaya* (extinction of hatred), *mohakkhaya* (extinction of delusion), *taṇhakkhaya* (extinction of desire), *anuppāda* (non-becoming), *appavatta* (non-continuance), *animitta* (signless), *appaṇihita* (desireless), *anāyūhana* (non-action), *appaṭisandhi* (unborn), *anupapatti* (non-rebirth), *agati* (non-existence), *ajāta*

(unbecome) *ajāra* (no-aging), *abyādhī* (non-sickness) *amata* (deathless), *asoka* (non-sorrow) *aparideva* (non-lamentation) *anupāyāsa* (non-despair), *asaṅkiliṭṭha* (taintlessness or purification) etc. The citation comes from the commentary of *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, Di-N.⁵³

As a matter of fact, the synonyms of *Nibbāna* are more than the above names. The aforementioned statement has not yet counted some common and useful synonyms of *Nibbāna*. For instance, here are some of the words: *suññata* (void), *abhūta* (nothingness), *santi* (peace), and *khema* (safe, tranquil, or full of peace) in the Pāli literature. It would be interesting to study synonyms for the word, *Nibbāna*. In fact, both the Pāli and Sanskrit languages are, like English, rich in synonyms. Just as in English there is the thesaurus, which gives many synonyms and antonyms, so the Pāli and Sanskrit languages have similar kinds of works, known as lexicons. There is a book in Pāli language, named *Abhidhānappadīpikā* that shows different words that have the same meaning. The greater part of the book is a collection of synonyms and the book contains 1,203 verses, excluding the colophon. Synonyms for *Nibbāna* are given in the book. There are altogether 46 different names for the word *Nibbāna*.⁵⁴

In Buddhist literature, every now and then, the word *asaṅkhata* has been also used to describe the meaning of *Nibbāna*. *Asaṅkhata* is also synonymous with the word *Nibbāna*. Etymologically, the word *asaṅkhata* is a combination of the two words: *a+saṅkhata* in Pāli language. *A* here means "negation of", and

saṅkhata means "conditioned". This means: *paccayehi abhisāṅkhatattā saṅkhatam*; (Things, such as the five aggregates, are conditioned due to certain circumstances). The circumstances include *kamma* (action), *citta* (mind), *utu* (temperature or weather), and *āhāra* (food). In this regard, *asaṅkhata* here means "non-conditioned" or "unconditioned."⁵⁵

The word *asaṅkhata* is present in the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*, Di-N. The statements show how the word *asaṅkhata* (unconditioned) and *Nibbāna* (absolute peace) are related to one another from the point of view of the etymological context. The statement reads as follows:

*Parinibbute bhagavati saha parinibbānā sakko devānamindo imam
gātham abhāsi; aniccā vata saṅkhārā, uppādavayadhammino.
uppajjitvā nirujjhanti, tesam vūpasamo sukho.*⁵⁶

At the Blessed Lord Buddha's final passing, Sakka, ruler of the devas, uttered this verse: impermanent are compounded things, prone to rise and fall, having risen, they're destroyed, their passing truest bliss.⁵⁷

The phrase, '*tesam vūpasamo sukho*' (their passing truest bliss), seems to be unclear in this context. Therefore, the commentator, Buddhaghosa, clarified the meaning of *asaṅkhata* in the commentary of *Mahāvagga*, that is, *Mahāvagga-atthakathā*, Di-N.

*Tesam vūpasamo-ti tesam saṅkhārānam vūpasamo. asaṅkhatam
nibbānameva sukham-ti attho.*⁵⁸

Tesam vūpasamo (their passing truest bliss) means since all *saṅkhāras* (compounded things) have ceased, the state of *Nibbāna* that is the unconditional state (*asaṅkhata*) that is considered to be the truest bliss (*santi-sukha*).⁵⁹

In this context, the word *Nibbāna* and the word *asaṅkhata* (the unconditioned) have the same meaning, just the words are different. With regard to the meaning of *Nibbāna* it is understood that if something is subject to be conditioned, then whatever is born (*jāta*), become (*bhūta*), and compounded (*saṅkhata*) is subject to decay; no one can wish that it cannot be, that it does not decay. However, *Nibbāna* is not subject to the conditional things, that is, decay, birth or becoming. The statement delivered by the Buddha reads: *yaṃ taṃ jātaṃ bhūtaṃ saṅkhataṃ palokadhammaṃ, taṃ vata mā palujjī-ti. netarṃ thānaṃ vijjati* (Whatever is born, become, compounded is subject to decay, it cannot be that it does not decay).⁶⁰ It is clear that *Nibbāna* has many canonical contexts to define its meaning.

Nibbāna and Early Buddhist Concept

In historical context, there is no doubt that early Indian religious traditions were influenced by the conception of *Moksha*. At that time, the concept of *Moksha* was considered to be the highest goal of life for the Indian traditions. Yet within Indian traditions, the different schools differ with regard to the nature of *Mukti*, the means for its realization, and *Moksha*, the experience of release, because of their different metaphysical positions and attitudes. In

Jainism, *Moksha* literally means release. This means that it is the liberation of the soul from evil and from further transmigrations.⁶¹

In general, liberation from suffering or sins are a conception of religions. In this context, Buddhism proclaims its goal, which is to attain *Nibbāna* or liberation (*mutti or vimutti*). Since the Buddha began to give the very first talk to his audience, he emphasized the significance of *Dukkha-nirodha-saccā* (Truth of cessation of suffering). In this regard, the word *dukkha-nirodha* can be also interpreted as liberation. Buddhists attempt to seek the way of liberation in order to obtain absolute peace, that is, freedom from death and rebirth. Thus Buddhists have a religious dream that is to attain the psychological and biological liberation.

Regarding the interpretation of *Nibbāna*, there was a concept of early Buddhism that provided its *Nibbānic* view with the two chief disciples' statements. The two chief disciples: Venerable Sāriputta and Venerable Moggallāna interpreted *Nibbāna* as a deathless state. Once, while looking at a show, the two men named Upatissa and Kolita, who later became Ven. Sāriputta and Ven. Moggallāna respectively, deeply realized the insubstantiality of things in life. Consequently, they decided to renounce household life and search for the way of liberation.⁶² However, before they renounced all things, they promised one another to inform each other, if one had attained the state of deathlessness.

In this context, Buddhists are able to understand what the meaning of *Nibbāna* is.

*Tena kho pana samayena sārīputtamoggallānā sañcaye paribbājike brahmacariyaṃ caranti. Tehi katikā katā hoti "yo pathamaṃ amataṃ adhigacchati. So itarassa ārocetū-ti."*⁶³

While Venerable Sāriputta and Venerable Moggallāna were residing under the guidance of the ascetic teacher named Sañcaya, they made a promise to one another saying thus, "if one has attained first the state of the deathless, then the one ought to inform the latter."⁶⁴

Though early Buddhists could understand what the significance of *Nibbāna* or liberation meant to them based on canonical context, the concept of liberation from birth and death could raise a philosophical question for modern Buddhists. Their statement about the idea of liberation is a religious concept, but it contains a critical issue. How does one link the two things: enlightenment (*arahatta-magga-phala-nāṇa*), which practically links to the word *Nibbāna*, and liberation? A man who has enlightened intuition can see the world with all its tragic circumstances as the basic reality. Such a person wishes to get free of this suffering world; such a person wishes to free the mind with the power of wisdom. Wisdom or enlightenment can remove craving, which links the tragic world to one self. Moreover, wisdom can see that if there is a man who has enlightened intuition in this life, the man no longer needs to pass through a series of lives, including that of gods (*devas*), spirits (*petas*), human beings (*manussa*), animals (*tiricchānas*) and other lower beings. Realizing the life

process of a being, Buddhists postulate that the role of enlightenment is an essential Buddhist concept for liberation.

What is the concept of a state of enlightenment? In this case, the state of enlightenment can be understood as the realization of truths or a state of mind, which is liberated from defilements. There is no longer a tendency to cling to anything through the power of enlightenment. Here is one relevant statement, which is addressed by the Buddha to his disciples regarding the subject of enlightenment. The statement reads:

*Vimuttasmiṃ "vimutta" miti nāṇaṃ hoti. "khīṇā jāti, vusitaṃ brahmacariyaṃ, kataṃ karanīyaṃ, nāparaṃ itthatthāyā" ti pajānātīti. Idamavoca bhagavā. attamanā pañcavaggiyā Bhikkhū bhagavato bhāsitaṃ abhinandun. imasmiṃ ca pana veyyākaraṇasmiṃ bhaññamāne pañcavaggiyānaṃ bhikkhūnaṃ anupādāya āsavehi cittaṇi vimuccimsūti.*⁶⁵

When it is liberated there comes the knowledge: "It's liberated." He understands: "Destroyed is birth, the holy life has been lived, what had to be done has been done, there is no more for this state of being." That is what the Blessed One said. Elated, these *bhikkhus* (monks) delighted in the Blessed One's statement. And while this discourse was being spoken, the minds of the *bhikkhus* of the group of five were liberated from the taints by non-clinging.⁶⁶

The above statement is considered to be a psychological viewpoint of *Nibbāna* rather than a philosophical viewpoint. If the statements are assumed as a psychological realization, then the essence of *Nibbāna* must be characterized from the viewpoint of mental factors. Could Buddhist scholars recognize the state of *Nibbāna* as a mental factor? Yes, it is so recognized. Yet *Nibbāna* is also described as a sequence of purifications. To know the sequence of purifications

is to understand the content of enlightenment based on the chain of Dependent Origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*) or path of purification. These two aspects will be discussed later in this work. Usually Buddhist literature attempts to describe the state of *Nibbāna* as a sequence of purification as it contains no greed (*lobha*), no hatred (*dosa*) and no delusion (*moha*) which are considered to be the fundamental roots of the defilements.

In the *Sīlakkhandhavagga-abhinava-tīkā*, Di-N, the defilements, such as greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*), and delusion (*moha*), are likened to poison, because they cause those who cannot overcome the defilements to get a lot of suffering. The canonical statement reads: *anattahajananato visa-saṅkāsatāya kilesa visam* (defilements are likened to poisons due to causing wordlings (*puthujjana*) to get a great deal of suffering).⁶⁷ In reality, the poisons of defilements can harm oneself as well as others. Not only that, the poisons create deadly conditions for those who imbibe or touch them. Therefore, Buddhist practitioners believe that if one is able to remove the defilements from oneself, one can attain *Nibbāna* (absolute peace). Moreover, overcoming the defilements through meditation is obtaining the "purification of mind." The way of approaching the sequence of purification relates more or less or is relevant to psychological aspects of the mind. However, the early Buddhist concept was that the state of enlightenment or the attainment of *Nibbāna* was after all liberation

from all sufferings due to eradication of defilements (the unwholesome mental factors).

The Buddha spoke the following utterance for the very first time, right after the moment of his attainment of enlightenment or *Nibbāna*. The statement is affirmed to be the very first personal expression of the Buddha. According to *Sīlakkhandhavagga-aṭṭhakathā*, Di-N, there are three groups of the Buddha's words: *paṭhama-Buddhavacana* (the first utterance of the Buddha), *majjhima-Buddhavacana* (the utterance of the Buddha between all the teachings except the first and the last utterance) and *pacchima-Buddhavacana* (the last utterance of the Buddha). The citation is: *Sabbameva hidaṃ paṭhama-Buddhavacanam majjhima-Buddhavacanam pacchima-Buddhavacanān-ti tippabhedam hoti* (the Buddha's teachings are divided into three groups: the very first speech, middle speech, and the last speech).⁶⁸ Of the three groups of the Buddha's utterance, the first utterance of the Buddha is as follows:

*Anekajātisamsāram, sandhāvissam anibbisam.
Gahakāram gavesanto, dukkhā jāti punappunam.
Gahakāraka diṭṭhosi, puna geham na kāhasi.
Sabbā te phāsukā bhaggā, gahakūṭam visaṅkhatam.
Visaṅkhāragatam cittam, tanhānam khayamajjhagā.*⁶⁹

Seeking but not finding the House Builder,
I hurried through the round of many births:
Painful is birth ever and again.
O House Builder, you have been seen;
You shall not build the house again.
Your rafters have been broken up,
Your ridgepole is demolished too.

My mind has now attained the unformed *Nibbāna*
And reached the end of every sort of craving.⁷⁰

Here the statement contains some philosophical issues. The Buddha uttered these words to himself. It is understood that no one can remove craving from another. Only through the power of enlightenment is craving removed. Craving exists in *saṃsāra*. If it is true that *Nibbāna* does not exist in *saṃsāra*, then how can one explain the relationship between craving and *Nibbāna*. As a matter of fact, the power of enlightenment sets the two things apart. Craving is linked to *saṃsāra* and non-craving to *Nibbāna* where no rebirth exists. Thus it is understood that where there is *Nibbāna*, there is no rebirth at all.

In the context of the three utterances of the Buddha, when the Buddha was about to enter the final *Nibbāna*, called *mahā-parinibbāna*, the Buddha precisely addressed the significance of the *Dhamma* to his disciples. These words of the Buddha are affirmed as the last utterance of the Buddha: *idaṃ pacchima-Buddhavacanam*; (this is the last sentence that the Buddha spoke). The statement is recorded in the *Mahā-parinibbāna Sutta*, Di-N.

*Atha kho bhagavā bhikkhū āmantesi "Handa dāni bhikkhave āmantayāmi vo. veyyadhammā saṅkhārā, appamādena sampādetthā" ti. ayam tathāgatassa pacchima vācā.*⁷¹

Then the Lord said to the monks: "Now, monks, I declare to you: all conditioned things are of a nature to decay -- strive on untiringly." These were the Tathāgata's last words.⁷²

Moreover, early Buddhists postulated that the Buddha is the most extraordinary example of the experience of *Nibbāna*. He himself attained

enlightenment and understood the essence of *Nibbāna* through meditation.

According to Buddhist texts, he attained enlightenment by himself without any external help, striving on untiringly. He knew that it was not so easy for listeners of his teaching to understand what *Nibbāna* really means. Therefore, at first the Buddha's mind was inclined to inaction rather than to teaching the *Dhamma*, because he knew that it was difficult to teach the *Dhamma* to these beings who have much dust in their eyes, but he eventually preached to them out of compassion. The following is the Buddha's reflection recorded in

Mahāpadāna Sutta Di-N.

Adhigato kho myāyaṃ dhammo gambhīro duddaso duranubodho santo paṇīto atakkāvacaro nipuṇo paṇḍitavedanīyo. ālayarāmā kho panāyaṃ pajā ālayatā ālayasammuditā. ālayarāmā kho pana pajāya ālayatāya ālayasammuditāya duddasaṃ indaṃ thānaṃ yadidaṃ idappaccayatā paṭiccasamuppādo. idampi kho thānaṃ duddasaṃ yadidaṃ sabbasaṅkhārasamatho sabbūpadhipaṭinissaggo taṇhakkhayo virāgo nirodho nibbānaṃ. ahañceva kho pana dhammaṃ deseyyaṃ. pare ca me na ājāneyyūṃ. so mamassa kilamatho. sā mamassa vihesā-ti.⁷³

I have attained to this *Dhamma* which is profound, hard to see, hard to grasp, peaceful, excellent, beyond reasoning (*atakkāvacaro*), subtle, to be apprehended by the wise. But this generation delights in clinging, rejoices in it and revels in it. But for those who so delight, rejoice and revel in clinging this matter is hard to see, namely the conditioned nature of things, or dependent origination. Equally hard to see would be the calming of all the mental formations, the abandonment of all the substrates of rebirth, the waning of craving, dispassion, cessation and *Nibbāna*. And if I were to teach *Dhamma* to others and they did not understand me, that would be a weariness and a trouble to me.⁷⁴

As we can see from this canonical context, this is one reason why early Buddhists probably kept silent without generating any argumentative problems

regarding interpretations of *Nibbāna*. It is also understood that the clear explanations of the Buddha, as well as Ven. Sāriputta, enlightened followers in a way in which *Nibbāna* was directly seen as the final liberation. The concept of early Buddhist liberation may be similar to other religious concepts of salvation or release in outer appearance, in the terms of language, but the concept of *Nibbāna*, liberation in this sense, is different from the other religious followers' interpretations.

Canonical Interpretations of *Nibbāna*

Having known that *Nibbāna* is liberation from all sufferings, one would emphasize the state of liberation as the state of deathlessness. Since this theory is prominent among the early Buddhists, they deny the concept of soul theory and its state of eternity. They refuse to speak of any eternal beings including a supreme Soul (*Brahma*) and the concept of a mighty God. The doctrines of early Buddhism do not mention anything about the condition of everlasting living beings. Instead of accepting the view of eternity, they reject the concept of an eternal living entity. The emphasis of their view is that after an enlightened being (*arahanta*) enters the final state of *Nibbāna*, his or her aggregates leave no substance. Because of this kind of understanding, they may feel that it is not so important for them to discuss the state of the enlightened beings after death. Yet their view cannot escape from philosophical inquiry. The doctrines should

explain something about these matters, even if it may not be beneficial for someone who has entered into the state of *Nibbāna*. Thus, some Buddhist scholars attempt to interpret *Nibbāna* as void from the word *suññata* in Pāli, or as extinction from the word *khaya*, or as nothingness (*abhāva*), and emptiness (*tuccha*).

In reality, the state of *Nibbāna* has its own significance. However, thinking of it with a secular mind that is naturally inclined toward sensual pleasure is far away from the real essence of *Nibbāna*. And also it is impossible for one who doesn't experience the state of *Nibbānic* happiness to understand where the enlightened beings will be after entering into the state of *Nibbāna*. However, Buddhists believe that *Arahants* can know about their property of self-realization. According to canonical text, the *Arahants* know the supramundane object and the qualities of their realization through their enlightened supramundane wisdom. Their experience is likened to an analytical experiment in Buddhist logic. The following is the Pāli passage addressed by the Buddha:

*Yato ca kho me bhikkhave imesu catūsu ariyasaccesu evaṃ tiparivattaṃ dvādasākāraṃ ñāṇadassanaṃ suvisuddhaṃ ahosi. athāhaṃ bhikkhave sadevake loke samārake sabrahmake sassamaṇabrāhmaṇiyā pajāya sadevamanussāya anuttaraṃ sammāsambodhiṃ abhisambuddhoḥi paccaññāsīm, ñāṇaṇca pana me dassanaṃ udapādi, akuppā me vimmutti, ayamantimā jāti, natthi dāni punabbhavo-ti.*⁷⁵

When my knowledge and vision of these Four Noble Truths as they really are in their three phases and twelve aspects was thoroughly purified in this way, then I claimed to have awakened to the unsurpassed perfect enlightenment in this world with its *devas*, *Māra*, and *Brahmā*, in

this generation with its ascetics and brahmins, its *devas* and humans. The knowledge and vision arose in me: "Unshakable" is the liberation of my mind. This is my last birth. Now there is no more renewed existence.⁷⁶

As has been stated since the Buddha attained enlightenment, he proclaimed, "This is my last birth." This means that he was no longer under the bondage of death after his death. In this regard, the Buddha emphasized only liberation of mind through perfect enlightenment. Yet there is a question that might remain in a listener's mind about his teachings. People are keen to know whether or not the Buddha addressed biological liberation and how that is related to the significance of *Nibbāna*. The Buddha, indeed, addressed his disciples about this issue at different times and in different locations.

The Buddha realized that a human possesses *carita* (personal nature). This means that *carita* (*vāthanā* in Burmese) is the character of a person, which is linked to his or her natural attitudes and conduct. "The temperaments of people differ from the diversity of their past *kammas*. The commentators state that temperament is determined by the *kamma* productive of the rebirth-linking consciousness."⁷⁷ According to the *Visuddhimagga* (The Path of Purification), there are briefly six types of temperament (*carita*): *rāgacarita* (greedy temperament), *dosacarita* (hating temperament), *mohacarita* (deluded temperament), *saddhārcarita* (faithful temperament), and *buddhicarita* (intelligent temperament), and *vitakkacarita* (speculative temperament). However,

Some will have fourteen, taking these six single ones together with the four made up of the three double combinations and one triple combination with the greed triad and likewise with the faith triad. But if this classification is admitted, there are many more kinds of temperament possible by combining greed, etc., with faith, etc.; therefore, the kinds of temperaments should be understood briefly as only six.⁷⁸

Based on their temperament, each individual will have personal interest in worldly aspects as well as spiritual aspects of life. For instance, in worldly conditions, one might like green, while the other prefers red to other colors. In spiritual practice, some may appreciate the practice of tranquility (*samatha*) meditation (*kammaṭṭhāna* in Pāḷi, *kammaṭṭhan* in Burmese), such as loving-kindness meditation or the practice of compassion, while some might prefer the practice of insight (*vipassanā*) meditation to other meditations. Realizing this situation, the Buddha used his skillfulness in the *Dhamma* by addressing his teachings from different perspectives for the sake of personal temperament. The Buddha sometimes emphasized in his teachings not only the psychological liberation, but also the biological liberation. Therefore, *Nibbāna* can be understood as liberation that involves psychological and biological liberation. There is a statement of the Buddha recorded in the *Suttanipāta Pāḷi*, Kh-N.

*Akiñcanam anādānam, etam dīpam anāparam.
Nibbānamī-ti nam brūmi, jarāmaccuparikkhayam.*⁷⁹

No fear is in the Island, no clinging with greed is in the Island, nothing is in refuge, but the island is *Nibbāna*. The island is somewhere; that is free from aging and death.⁸⁰

In this context, *Nibbāna* is somewhere like a safe island, which is free from death and all that is related to suffering. As has been mentioned, the audiences are varied intellectually and psychologically so that some may not understand the interpretation of *Nibbāna* as a metaphorical definition, although others may find it easy to understand such metaphorical explanations. Regarding the interpretation of *Nibbāna*, the Buddha's chief disciple, Ven. Sāriputta attempts to interpret what *Nibbāna* means for the benefit of students. His statement is clear to some and easy to understand for some Buddhist practitioners, since his definition is very much based on the psychological interpretation. His interpretation of *Nibbāna* seems ideal to the wandering ascetic named Jambukhādaka who asked him about *Nibbāna*. The statement is the following recorded in *Nibbāna-paṇḥā Sutta*, Sa-N.

*"Nibbānaṃ Nibbāna"nti āvuso sāriputta vuccati. katamaṃ nu kho āvuso nibbānanti. yo kho āvuso rāgakkhayo dosakkhayo mohakkhayo. idaṃ vuccati "nibbāna" ti.*⁸¹

Q: Friend Sāriputta, it is said, "*Nibbāna, Nibbāna*." What now is *Nibbāna*? A: (Friend Jambukhādaka), The destruction of lust, the destruction of hatred, the destruction of delusion: this is called *Nibbāna*.⁸²

In this statement, Ven. Sāriputta's definition of *Nibbāna* is that which is free from the defilements of lust, hatred and delusion. If one harbors lust, hatred, and delusion, then one might create some problems that generate more suffering. For him, if there were no defilements, there would no longer be

suffering. In reality, without attaining enlightenment, it is impossible to destroy the power of lust, hatred, and delusion. Thus, Ven Sāriputta emphasized his statement that *Nibbāna* is the destruction of lust, hate and delusion. And then, he provided the way for the realization of this *Nibbāna* with the Noble Eightfold Path; that is, *Sammā-Diṭṭhi* (Right View), *Sammā-Saṅkappa* (Right Intention), *Sammā-Vācā* (Right Speech), *Sammā-Kammanta* (Right Action), *Sammā-Ājīva* (Right Livelihood), *Sammā-Vāyama* (Right Effort), *Sammā-Sati* (Right Mindfulness), and *Sammā-Samādhi* (Right Concentration).⁸³

In addition, no matter how many definitions of *Nibbāna* occur in canonical texts, there is only one characteristic that holds together the two divisions of the canonical definitions fundamentally. *Nibbāna* is, after all, a state of liberation. That liberation contains two divisions. One is psychological liberation that is related to mind, while the other is biological liberation that is related to the five aggregates, more precisely to existence. Having realized this condition, Ven. Sāriputta drew out a line of reasoning about *Nibbāna*, that is, a kind of conclusion of his discourse. That is recorded in *Paṭisambhidāmagga*, Kh-N. The statement reads: *Uppādo saṅkhārā, anuppado Nibbānanti santipade ñāṇam. pavattaṃ saṅkhārā, appavattaṃ Nibbānanti santipade ñāṇam* (Arising into existence is *saṅkhāra*. The absence of becoming is *Nibbāna*. The process of phenomena is *saṅkhāra* and the non-progress of phenomena is *Nibbāna*).⁸⁴ In most cases, the technical term for the word *saṅkhāra* is translated as "mental

formation" in Buddhist texts, but here it means the opposite of *Nibbāna*.

According to *Paṭisambhidāmagga*, *Nibbāna* means "the absence of becoming" or "the absence of existence." In this context, it may be understood that sometimes the meaning of *Nibbāna* may refer to biological liberation.

Commentarial Interpretations of *Nibbāna*

As has been mentioned with canonical interpretations of *Nibbāna*, the meaning of *Nibbāna* is understood with reference to what it means to the audience. Pāli commentators believe that the canonical interpretations are clear enough to understand what *Nibbāna* is. All Buddha's teachings are very much based on theoretical application for their practical foundation. However, it is pointed out that it is definitely not sufficient to realize the true essence of *Nibbāna* unless one has a practical approach. In fact, one is supposed to learn theory first, then one must apply the theories to the practice for the sake of mental development. In this way, one can understand the significance of *Nibbāna*.

Pāli commentators made an important statement about realizing the nature of *Nibbāna*. One must have a proper approach in practice in order to understand the canonical interpretation of *Nibbāna*. They strongly affirm in their statements that without the practice of meditation, it is impossible to realize the true nature of *Nibbāna* or the experience of enlightenment. To confirm their

position, the commentator, Anuruddhā-thera attempted to state his view with logical and practical sense in the *Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha*. The statement is as follows:

*Nibbānaṃ pana lokuttarasankhātāṃ catummaggañāṇena sacchikātabbāṃ magga-phalānaṃ-ārammaṇabhūtaṃ vānasankhātāya taṇhāya nikkhantattā nibbāna-nti pavuccati.*⁸⁵

Nibbāna is termed supramundane, and is to be realized by the knowledge of the four paths.⁸⁶ It becomes an object to the paths and fruits, and is called *Nibbāna* because it is a departure from craving, which is an entanglement.⁸⁷

Based on the aforementioned statement, one can realize the nature of *Nibbāna* through *lokuttara-citta* (supramundane consciousness). One can attain *Nibbāna* through *lokuttara-magga* (Noble Path or the transcendental state of the path). Who can realize nature of *Nibbāna*? According to Theravāda Buddhism, only enlightened beings can truly realize *Nibbāna*. In this canonical context, it is understood that the property of *Nibbāna* belongs to only enlightened beings.

Buddhaghosa was the well-known commentator who lived in the fifth century A.D. His most prominent work is the *Visuddhimagga* (The Path of Purification) and Pāli canonical commentaries. He was able to summarize the *Ti-piṭakas* (Three Baskets) by combining ancient commentaries and making a new commentary, as an epitome. Since there is so much confusion in Buddhist doctrines concerning the concept of *Nibbāna*, he attempted to readjust the aforementioned interpretations. First, he analyzed the meaning of *Nibbāna*

through practice and then clarified what *Nibbāna* meant to him. The most significant point of his work is clear and concise. He had the ability to make a clear outline for all teachings of the Buddha. The outline is: in order to attain *Nibbāna* or enlightenment, one must fulfill the three training exercises, *sīla* (morality or virtue), *samādhi* (concentration) and *paññā* (wisdom). This is the essential requirement for everyone who really wants to attain insight wisdom or enlightenment. However, he did not ignore the necessary prerequisite requirements, such as *pāramī* (perfections) and *saddhā* (faith in the *Dhamma* practice), and *adhiṭṭhāna* (resolution in the *Dhamma* practice). His affirmation is as follows:

*Apica Nibbānaṃ natthī-ti na vattabbaṃ. kasmā? Paṭipattiyā vañjhabhāvāpajjanato. Asati hi nibbāne sammādiṭṭhipurejavāya sīlādi-khandhattayasaṅgahāya sammāpaṭipattiyā vañjhabhāvo āpajjati na cāyaṃ vañjhā nibbānapāpanato-ti.*⁸⁸

Again, it should not be said that *Nibbāna* does not exist. Why not? Because it then follows that the way would be futile. For if *Nibbāna* were non-existence, then it would follow that the right way, which includes the three aggregates beginning with virtue and headed by right understanding, would be futile. And it is not futile because it does reach *Nibbāna*.⁸⁹

In the *Visuddhimagga*, Buddhaghosa precisely analyzed the interpretation of *Nibbāna* and remarked that some people misunderstand the concept of *Nibbāna* as a hare's horn (*sasa-visāṇa*) which does not really exist. He strongly rejected the concept of the non-existence of *Nibbāna*, because it is apprehendable by the way of virtue (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*) and wisdom

(*paññā*). He attempts to readjust some former interpretations in order to get a better understanding. For instance, he deals with the Ven. Sāriputta's interpretation of *Nibbāna*, which stated that *Nibbāna* means *rāga-kkhaya* (extinction of craving or destruction of lust). The statement reads as follows:

"Yo kho āvuso rāgakkhayo" ti ādivacanato "khayo nibbānan" ti ce. na, arahattassāpi khayamattāpajjanato. tampi hi "yo kho āvuso rāgakkhayo" to ādinā nayena niddiṭṭham.⁹⁰

But is not *Nibbāna* destruction, because of the passage beginning "That, friend, which is the destruction of greed . . . [of hate . . . of delusion . . . is *Nibbāna*]" (Sa-N. IV, 251)? That is not so, because it would follow that Arahantship also was mere destruction. For that too is described in the [same] way beginning "That, friend, which is the destruction of greed . . . of hate . . . of delusion . . . is Arahantship]" (S. iv, 252).⁹¹

Regarding the issue of destruction, he refers back to the original word *rāgakkhaya*, which means destruction. Buddhaghosa argues that *khaya* (destruction) does not refer to *Nibbāna*, but the aggregates of the *Arahants* in Pāli, (*Yahantā-puggo* in Burmese), that is, enlightened beings. Enlightened beings destroy all defilements that have the *kammic* power to generate new existences. He attempts to elucidate a clear statement, providing the words of the Buddha as support. "Because it is the word of the Omniscient One, *Nibbāna* is not non-existent as regards individual essence in the ultimate sense; for this is said: '*Bhikkhus* (monks), there is an unborn, an unbecome, an unmade, an unformed' (Iti. 37; Ud. 80)."⁹²

The conclusion of his interpretation is: "Only this {that is, *Nibbāna*} is permanent [precisely because it is uncreated]; and it is immaterial because it transcends the individual essence of matter. The Buddha's goal is one and has no plurality."⁹³ However, in this context of the interpretation of *Nibbāna*, the presumably contemporary commentator Arahant Upatissa briefly commented on *Nibbāna* in his own way in the *Vimutti-magga* (The Path of Freedom). His emphasis is on "the utter fading away and cessation of the very craving, leaving it, giving it up, the being delivered from, the doing away with it. Thus should be known the Noble Truth of the Cessation of Ill."⁹⁴ For him, the state of not coming to birth, not perishing in nature, and realizing the Third Noble Truth, i.e., the cessation of suffering or the ending of ill, is called *Nibbāna*. To sum up the statement, the interpretation of *Nibbāna* by the commetator is clear and concise. One can know the interpretation of *Nibbāna* from different perspectives. These perspectives tell us that *Nibbāna* is nothing but freedom from *kamma-vipāka* (the resultants of past and present *kamma*) and the bondage of *saṃsāra* (the cycle of birth and death or existences) generated by *taṇhā* (craving) or *lobha* (attachment) and ignorance (*avijjā*). Thus the significance of liberation can be understood in many ways.

Non-Theravāda Buddhist Scholars' Interpretations of *Nibbāna*

In this context, non-Theravāda Buddhism mainly refers to Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism. In fact, the doctrines of the two schools are fundamentally based on the teachings of the Buddha. Some interpretations or some definitions are agreeable to one another, but some are not. Both have a common goal, which is to reach *Nibbāna*. In general, the two schools are struggling for the interpretation of *Nibbāna*. Most Theravādin followers view that the state of *Nibbāna* is a potential so that one can attain it through practice in this very life, while most Mahāyāna followers view that enlightenment (*Nibbāna*) already exists in everyone, so that one can attain it through practice. Yet both schools emphasize *Nibbāna* as freedom from illusion or ignorance (*avijjā*). For Theravādin followers, liberation from *avijjā* (ignorance) and *taṇhā* (craving) is the realization of ultimate reality and the attainment of *Nibbāna*. For most followers of the Mahāyāna traditions, by gaining freedom from illusion or by emptying mind of everything, one can return to the Original or Universal Mind, that is, the Buddha nature.⁹⁵ The citation is as follows:

By gaining freedom from illusion, one returns to the Ultimate, and by returning to the Ultimate, one attains the Original. The state of attainment of the Original is the state of *Nirvāna*. But *Nirvāna* is not something external to and altogether different from the Wheel of Birth and Death, nor is the reality of the Buddha-nature external to and altogether different from the phenomenal world. Once one gains Sudden Enlightenment, the latter is at once the former. . . . The Enlightenment of Mahāyāna Buddhism is not to be sought outside the Wheel of Birth and Death. Within it one is enlightened by the affairs of birth and death.⁹⁶

It is clear that both Buddhist traditions accord ignorance an important role as a hindrance to *Nibbāna*. Theravādin Buddhists often say that the power of ignorance can hinder the way to the attainment of *Nibbāna*. In this context, Mahāyāna Buddhists say the same thing as well. "This is the meaning of a common saying of Chinese Buddhism: 'When ignorant, one is a common man; when enlightened, one is a sage.'"⁹⁷

Among the non-Theravāda Buddhist schools, the two most famous ones are the Madhyamika (*Madhyamika*) School and Yogācāra School. The philosopher, Nāgarjuna established The Madhyamika School, also known as the "Middle Way." He lived in the second century A.D. Nāgarjuna emphasized doctrinal systems of philosophy and the method he introduced used logic to understand Buddhism based on an *Abhidharma* perspective (*Abhidhamma*, in Pāli). Unlike the method of deconstruction in philosophy, his work used logic to reduce common sense ideas with *Abhidhamma* philosophical analysis.⁹⁸

The Yogācāra School, also known as "the Mind Only School," co-founded by Asanga who lived in the fourth century A.D., emphasized meditative practice to present the Buddha's Middle Way by advocating the practice of meditation to explore the essence of ultimate reality. Unlike Nāgarjuna, Asanga's statement was that one's perceptions and conceptions do not exist naturally and inherently, but they are "relative phenomena" with cause and conditions.⁹⁹

Nāgarjuna didn't attempt to emphasize *Nibbāna's* characteristics of freedom and non-rebirth, but his statement is to awaken one to ultimate truth, that is, *Nibbāna*. He believed that the ultimate truth should be explained by language. However, language is itself conventional and conditional. Yet language as worldly truth is essential for understanding ultimate truth. Nāgarjuna's position is that ultimate truth cannot be obtained with language, which is worldly truth. But without understanding ultimate truth, *Nirvāna* cannot be understood. For him, words, names and language are empty; beings and non-beings are empty, and to know of both being and non-being as empty is ultimate truth. The true state of the universe cannot be described as being or non-being. However, some Mahāyāna traditional masters, such as San-lun Master Chi-tsang point out that the terms *empty* or *emptiness* are sometimes used to discredit and devalue things. According to this master, empty things are worthless; therefore, the concept of emptiness should be discarded to eliminate the position of weakness for the Buddha's teachings. Nonetheless, concepts are just concepts, but not reality.

The reality of things cannot be explained by the interplay of concepts, such as being and non-beings, or existence and non-existence, Nāgarjuna claimed, 'Again, all things are empty. Why? Being and non-being are neither obtainable at the same time nor at different times'¹⁰⁰

As a matter of fact, Nāgarjuna's philosophy has greatly influenced Mahāyāna Buddhist traditions and has created various philosophical and

religious movements. Based on his view, most Mahāyāna Buddhist schools selected some aspects of Mādhyamika teachings as the original and essential teachings of the Buddha. Then they developed their own doctrines and religious practices. Some Mahāyāna Buddhist scholars even use his thought to support an ontological position in order to establish the view of metaphysics.

Metaphysical thinking involves the logic of "is" (*astī*) and "not-is" (*nāstī*), its argument being that something either exists or it does not. Pressed by this either/or logic, the early Buddhists felt to claim that *Nirvāna* "exists," or that it is negation of all that "exists." One can see them making claims such as "*Nirvāna* is existence in which suffering is absent," or that "*Nirvāna* is mere non-existence (of suffering)." ¹⁰¹

Reflecting on the above statement which deals with the metaphysics of "is" (*astī*) and "not-is" (*nāstī*), it must be said that such theoretical thinking cannot be a solution to the problems of suffering, since *saṃsāra* itself is assumed to be *Nirvāna*. If one persists in thinking that *Nirvāna* is absolute absence of existence interpreting it as nothingness (*abhāva*), emptiness (*tuccha*), or absolute extinction (*khaya*), then it is indeed falling into the view of a negative assertion. Nāgarjuna states that if it is true to say that "all existence is dependent existence," then one can assume that the "non-dependent is non-existence, including *Nirvāna*." ¹⁰² Since the language of *Nibbāna* involves different perspectives and many Buddhist scholars' interpretations, it is hard to draw a firm line or a conclusion.

Asanga, the co-founder of Yogācāra tradition attempted to support the spirit of Nāgarjuna's view, the doctrine of *śūnyatā*, with a variety of *upāya*

(methods), modifying the two truths: absolute truth (*paramarthasatya*) and relative truth (*samvritisatya*). He emphasized his views from the standpoint of three natures or characters (*lakṣaṇa* in Sanskrit): dependent (*paratantra* in Sanskrit), imaginary (*parikalpika* in Sanskrit) and absolute (*pariniṣpanna* in Sanskrit). Yet he attempted to define the word *Nirvāṇa* as cessation or extinction, more or less like early Buddhist interpretations. "Why is it that cessation is also called unimpeded (*nirvāṇa*)? Because it is free from the heat of all the defilements (*sarva-kilesacamtāpa*) and also the great heat of suffering caused by the non-satisfaction of all desires. Why is it that cessation is also called extinction (*nirvāṇa*)? Because it is a state of signless peaceful happiness (*animitta-sāntasukha*)."¹⁰³ In addition, there was a Buddhist philosopher named Vasubandhu who was one of the founders of Yogācāra. *Nirvāṇa* in his view is:

What is called *pratisamkhyānirodha* or *Nirvāṇa* is - when both the defilements already produced and the existence already produced are destroyed - the absence of any other defilements or any other existence, and by reason of the force of the consciousness (*pratisamkhyā-prajñā*). . . But, [the Sautrānikas remark,] the future non-arising of suffering supposes consciousness (*pratisamkhyā*); it is then included within *pratisamkhyānirodha*.¹⁰⁴

His view of *Nibbāna* says that a state of *Nibbāna* is the future non-arising of suffering due to the absence of any defilements or any other existence. This is saying that the absence of defilement is a key point in reaching *Nibbāna*. As a matter of fact, Buddhist scholars share their views with other religious seekers, who long for liberation.

To sum up the issue of Buddhist interpretations of *Nibbāna*, from the points of view of Buddhist scholars -- *Nibbāna* might have many meanings, though it has only one characteristic, that is absolute peace. Yet amazingly, Buddhist traditions generally agree with the definition of *Nibbāna* as "ultimate reality" in the sense of mind. Yet they might still have doubts about the aforementioned interpretations of *Nibbāna*. This is because the meaning of *Nibbāna* is different from what they think and the essence of *Nibbāna* is different from what they expect. Yet they probably edify themselves based on the previous work of interpretation. As one already knows, one can only attain *Nibbāna* through the practice of meditation.

Buddhist and Non-Buddhist Scholars' Interpretations of *Nibbāna*

As has been mentioned with the interpretations of *Nibbāna*, most scholars' interpretations are probably not based on their own experience of *Nibbāna* but their understanding of the concept of *Nibbāna* theoretically. Canonical texts often emphasize that to realize *Nibbāna* it is necessary to approach the practice of meditation. This is the fundamental guideline for the realization of the nature of *Nibbāna*. However, Buddhist and non-Buddhist scholars are likely to favor themselves implying that the best way to approach *Nibbāna* is through the theoretical and philosophical basis, but not the practical basis. It is possible to understand what the meaning of *Nibbāna* is theoretically

first. Yet this study firmly emphasizes that it is necessary to apply the two aspects: *pariyatti* (theoretical aspects) and *paṭipatti* (practical aspects) equally for a better understanding of *Nibbāna*.

It is really amazing to know how powerful the concept of *Nibbāna* is and how it can influence other cultures and traditions. In regard to this concept of *Nibbāna*, non-Buddhist scholars attempt to interpret the nature of *Nibbāna* as they understand it based on their own religious concepts. For instance, there is a statement from the Hindu perspective, which attempts to link the term to its own religious view. That viewpoint is represented by the following statement. "It was usual to say that the Buddha was only concerned with denying the small and egoistic self, not the grand Cosmic Self, whose identity with the Absolute (*brahman*), was the truth of *Nirvāna* just as it was of the salvation taught in the Upanisad-s."¹⁰⁵

Moreover, the non-Buddhist scholar, Max Muller attempted to interpret *Nirvāna* as the entrance of the soul into rest. There is no doubt that the way these scholars think of *Nirvāna* is based on their own belief. He states that *Nirvāna* is the following:

The entrance of the soul into rest, a subduing of all wishes and desires, indifference to joy and pain, to good and evil, and absorption of the soul in itself and a freedom from the circle of existences from birth to death, and from death to a new rebirth.¹⁰⁶

It is understandable that there is difficulty abandoning the theory of soul, although the entirety of the doctrines of Buddhism denies the concept of the soul theory. Yet it is interesting to know how others think of *Nibbāna* and how the concept of *Nibbāna* is something that they assume to be true in their own way. Nevertheless, the concept of *Nibbāna* may not be the same as what they assume. It is not within the scope of this study to add a comparative analysis of the concepts of *Nibbāna* from other religious perspectives in any detailed manner.

With regard to the religious perspectives, could one say that religion itself has the power to make people become confused in their belief system? No, it is not so. The objective of religion is to create peace for people. People can create their own peace through the practice of religion. However, no one can exactly proclaim whether this belief system is perfectly right or completely wrong. In fact, it is hard to say whether religions can create peace for humans, or humans create religions for peace. Thus the more one talks about belief systems, the more one might become confused. As a matter of fact, *Nibbāna* is not the kind of subject to speculate on, but a kind of approachable reality, that is an ultimate reality. In this sense, *Nibbāna* is nothing, but the experience of spirituality.

There is no doubt that some Theravāda Buddhists attempt to analyze the teachings of the Buddha and his doctrinal view of liberation based on a practical approach. Seeing these positions, the Buddhist scholar La Vallee Poussin states as follows:

The earliest Buddhism had no metaphysics at all, no learned or strictly reasoned theory concerning the totality and nature of things. Relying on the word of the Buddha, it believed that man consumes the fruit of his acts from existence to existence until the day when, delivered through illumination, he obtains supreme happiness in *nirvāna*.¹⁰⁷

Steven Collins is a modern Buddhist scholar who interprets *Nibbāna* as the process of cessation that puts an end to all conditioned, impermanent and unsatisfactory elements of existence. His positive view toward Buddhism is encouraging to those who are reluctant to accept Buddhism, since they misunderstand the nature of *Nibbāna* and see the *Dhamma* seeker's position as irrelevant to social engagement. He brings out his perspective of Buddhism and social engagement today. As a matter of fact, he does not attempt to resolve the concept of the two extremes: eternalism and annihilationism, but shows *Nibbāna* is part of a Buddhist value considering a transcendental and unconditioned soteriology. And regarding the question of the positions of enlightened beings after their death, his statement is as follows:

It has often seemed that the answer can only be one of two positions: either *Nirvāna* is some kind of "super-existence," such that the denial of self, the refusal to speak of any eternal essence, must not mean what it seems to mean; or else, the doctrine does indeed mean what it seems to mean, and so *Nirvāna* must be nothingness, extinction. The Buddhist doctrinal position can be stated simply. *Nirvāna* is indeed the ultimate religious goal, a state of release from all suffering and impermanence, but no language or concepts can properly describe it. It is *atakhāvacara*, "inaccessible to (discursive) thought" (It 37, Ud-a 391). In particular, it cannot be described as the state of a (or *the*) self. Modern Buddhist writers use the analogy of a tortoise unable to describe to a fish the experience of dry land.¹⁰⁸

As has been seen from some reasonable points of scholarly interpretations of *Nibbāna*, these interpretations are in one way or another beneficial to the academic study. Yet the scholars themselves are still struggling at differentiating between the two aspects: concept and reality. From the point of view of Buddhist perspective, the experience of *Nibbāna* is considered to be a kind of spirituality or the personal property of the spiritual path. Yet the aim of this study is to clarify the experience of reality together with theoretical concepts that support that reality. The experience of reality can be obtained based on the practical approach, while the theoretical concept links the texts, literature, and interpretations to that approach. Theoretical concept is something like a map that leads one to reach his or her destination comfortably. Thus it is impossible to avoid analyzing the meaning of *Nibbāna* without applying the theoretical aspects to this study.

Understanding *Nibbāna* Through Canonical Methods

As has been mentioned with theoretical aspects, an important role in this work, in order for this study to fulfill its goal is applying canonical methods. There are two important canonical methods: *paṭiccasamuppāda* (Dependent Origination) and *Vissuddhi-magga* (The Way of Purification of the Mind). These canonical methods are often used in Buddhist practice to reach the goal. They are systematically recorded in the Pāḷi canon and its commentaries.

In this context, the word *paṭiccasamuppāda* is a compound of *paṭicca* and *samuppāda*. *Paṭicca* here means "dependent on" and *samuppāda* means "arising" or "origination." Although the four types of ultimate realities and categories have already been mentioned, this study has not explained conditionality, causality, and the analysis of their relations. The doctrine of *Paṭicca Samuppāda* (Dependent Origination) is one of the doctrines that explain in detail the significance of causal relations. The method of *Paṭicca Samuppāda* is presented with reference to the specific causal efficacy of the conditions of the *Dhamma* or mental factors. According to canonical literature, the Buddha was able to attain his enlightenment after realizing the process of *Paṭicca Samuppāda*. The expression *Paṭicca Samuppāda* is fundamentally applied to the *dvārasaṅga* (twelve-term formula) and *dve-mūla* (two basic roots).¹⁰⁹

This method fundamentally indicates that no *hetu* (single cause) can produce a *vipāka* (effect) nor can only one *vipāka* arise from a single cause. In reality, there is always a collection of conditions that deal with a collection of effects. The brief formula of *Paṭicca Samuppāda* is that when there is something that exists, then there will be something that comes to be. If there is something that ceases, then there will be nothing that comes to be. There is the Pāli expression in Ac-Ab; *imasamiñ sati idaṃ hoti, imass' uppādā idaṃ uppajjati. imasmim asati idaṃ na hoti* (When this exists, that comes to be; with the arising of this, that arises. When this doesn't exist, that does not come to be). In the Pāli

text, the principle of *Paṭicca Samuppāda* is formally presented. The quotation is as follows:

*Avijjāpaccayā saṅkhārā, saṅkhārapaccayā viññāṇaṃ, viññāṇapaccayā nāmarūpaṃ, nāmarūpapaccayā saḷāyatanaṃ, saḷāyatanapaccayā phasso, phassapaccayā vedanā, vedanāpaccayā taṇhā, taṇhāpaccayā upādānaṃ, upādānapaccayā bhavo, bhavapaccayā jāti, jātipaccayā jarāmaraṇaṃ soka-parideva-dukkha-domanass’upāyāsā sambhavanti, evametassa kevalassa dukkhandhassa samudayo hoti.*¹¹⁰

Dependent on ignorance (*avijjā*) arise kammic formations, dependent on kammic formations (*saṅkhārā*) arises consciousness, dependent on consciousness (*viññāṇa*) arises mind-and-matter, dependent on mind-and-matter (*nāma-rūpa*) arise the six sense bases, dependent on the six sense bases (*saḷāyatana*) arises contact, dependent on contact (*phassa*) arises feeling, dependent on feeling (*vedanā*) arises craving, dependent on craving (*taṇhā*) arises clinging, dependent on clinging (*upādāna*) arises existence, dependent on existence (*bhava*) arises birth, dependent on birth (*jāti*) arise decay-and death (*jarā-maraṇa*), sorrow (*soka*), lamentation (*parideva*), pain (*dukkha*), grief (*domanassa*), and despair (*upāyāsa*). Thus arises this whole mass of suffering.¹¹¹

In fact, *Paṭicca Samuppāda* is the essential structure of causality as well as the round of existence (*vaṭṭa*). The condition of mental factors sustains the wheel of birth (*jāti*) and death (*marāṇa*). It involves the twelve factors: two (past) dependent factors, eight (present) dependent factors, and two (future) dependent factors. Of the twelve factors, the first two factors, *avijjā* (ignorance) and *saṅkhārā* (kammic formations), belong to the past. The eight factors, *viññāṇa* (consciousness), *nāma-rūpa* (mind-and-matter), *saḷāyatana* (six sense bases), *phassa* (contact), *vedanā* (feeling), *taṇhā* (craving), *upādāna* (clinging), and *bhava* (existence) belong to the present; and the last two factors, *jāti* (birth), and *jarā-maraṇa* (decay-and death), belong to the future. Included in Dependent

Origination are the two essential roots: *avijjā* (ignorance), and *taṇhā* (craving):

Avijjātaṇhāvasena dve mūlāni ca veditabbāni (Ignorance and craving should be understood as the two roots).¹¹²

According to the doctrine of *Paṭicca Samuppāda*, the whole mass of suffering, including birth and death, is due to these two essential roots. They are able to make all living beings revolve into one existence after another. The gist of the doctrine of *Paṭicca Samuppāda* is that if there is something that comes to exist, there are causes that come to exist, and there will be something that comes to be as well. Thus past, present, and future circumstances are related to one another. On the contrary, if there is something, more precisely *avijjā* (ignorance) and *taṇhā* (craving), that ceases, then there will be nothing that comes to exist anymore (*nirodha*). This means that if there are no mental factors of ignorance and craving, there will no more rebirth and death. In this way, it is understood how the theoretical method is applicable to point out the way to *Nibbāna*.

The other important canonical method is the *Visuddhi-magga* (The Path of Purification). This method is often used in Buddhist meditation practice, more precisely *satipaṭṭhāna* (mindfulness) meditation in order to reach one's goal, that is, *Nibbāna*. In Buddhism, the emphasis of this method is to explore the advanced states of the path that show the distinctive features of great clarity of mind which involves the purification of mind (*citta-visuddhi*). The gist of this method is mainly to purify the mind, using the development of mindfulness in

order to realize *Nibbāna*, which is interpreted as the state of perfect liberation from suffering. However, the method of mindfulness meditation will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

This study specifically deals with agreeable interpretations of the canonical texts and controversial interpretations of Buddhist literature, which is found in Buddhist and non-Buddhist scholars' works. Moreover the study initially provides a theoretical survey of different interpretations of *Nibbāna* and explores the practical method to realize the true experience of *Nibbāna*. As has been mentioned before, the mere theoretical analysis of phenomena including the concept of existence, non-existence, and conceptual liberation from discomfort of mind and body, it is not sufficient enough to reveal what the true meaning of *Nibbāna* is. There is a need to apply both theoretical and practical methods equally. Positive and negative scholarly interpretations are also justified, as through analyzing their work in interpreting *Nibbāna*, one may arrive at a clearer understanding about the concept of *Nibbāna*.

CHAPTER 3 EXISTENCE AND NON-EXISTENCE

What is *Bhava* (Existence)?

This chapter will focus on the Buddhist perspective of life (*bhava*) and death (*maraṇa*) which are in contradistinction to *Nibbāna* in process. To understand the process of life and death is of fundamental importance in this study for clarification of the meaning of *Nibbāna*. In Buddhist texts, there are two things that it is necessary to know about the process of life and death. Otherwise, one may not truly comprehend the advantages and disadvantages of existence. The two things are: (1) nature of life and (2) nature of death. According to Buddhism, death doesn't mean the end of existence, but the beginning of a new life, that is unless one has attained full enlightenment. In Buddhist doctrines, the process of living or continuity of existence is named *bhava* (existence); it is also known as *saṅkhata* (conditioned). *Nibbāna* has the opposite meaning; it is *asaṅkhata* (the unconditioned).

The word *bhava* implies the process of existences, involving constantly recurring birth and death, while *Nibbāna* excludes the process of existences and the consequent recurrence of birth and death. With regard to *bhava*, Burmese Buddhists often used to say the word *saṁsāra-dukkha* (*saṁsāric* suffering in Pāli), or "*Thamthayā Sinye*" or "*Bhava Thamthayā*" in Burmese. That means "life cycle." There is a common saying in the Burmese tradition. "Life is *saṁsāra*; when one is part of living in *saṁsāra*, there are many things that will

happen to one that involve a lot of suffering. If one is no longer in the round of existences, one has nothing to fear." Non-existence here assumes *Nibbāna* as a refuge in this context. But the existence of *Nibbāna* is different from the "concept of non-existence."

In terms of existence and non-existence, this study will explore first the concept of existence, that is, *bhava*. As has been mentioned, those who have entered the state of *Nibbāna* are no longer in the life cycle of birth and death or no longer in the process of *saṁsāra*. *Nibbāna* is described as an absolutely peaceful and blissful state of happiness (*santi-sukha*): *tesaṁ (saṅkhārānaṁ) vūpasamo sukho* (it is a truly blissful state, when the existence exists no longer.)¹¹³ It is a fact that without understanding the subject of Buddhist cosmology that describes the process of life and death, this study would not be complete. The information on the subject of life and death provides a clearer picture of *Nibbāna*.

In fact, the nature of existence (*bhava*) demonstrates a vivid picture of suffering. Suffering here means undesirable feeling in life. For instance, departing and separating from a loved one may be an undesirable feeling for one. The nature of death makes one suffer a lot. The living are left in sorrow with the separation from the beloved departed one. According to the *Āsīvisopama Sutta*, Sa-N Vol. II., *bhava* (existence) deals with dangers (*bhaya*) and has to face the so-called "evil death (*māra*)."¹¹⁴ Fortunately, there is hope, the

only hope for living beings. This is *Nibbāna* where there is liberation from death. The Buddha states that *Nibbāna* is something that is safe from all dangers and death. The statement of the Buddha is as follows:

*"Orimaṃ tīraṃ sāsāṅkaṃ sappatibhaya" nti kho bhikkhave sakkāyassetam adhivacanaṃ. "Pārimaṃ tīraṃ khemaṃ appatibhaya" nti kho bhikkhave nibbānassetam adhivacanaṃ.*¹¹⁴

"The near shore (*bhava*), which is dangerous and fearful": this is a designation for identity. "The further shore (*Nibbāna*), which is safe and free from danger": this is a designation for *Nibbāna*.¹¹⁵

In this context, *Nibbāna* directly refers to the deathless state (*amata*).

There is one important thing that one should know, that is how to form a link between the nature of death and the deathless state how to exchange the two properties. The property of death belongs to living beings, while the property of the deathless state belongs to enlightened beings. In this context, it is vitally important for this research to explore the nature of life and death. Therefore, it is necessary to explain the condition of worldly beings and the worlds in which they live before analyzing the nature of *Nibbāna*.

According to Buddhism, everything, including living beings and non-living things, is subject to decay as well as being subject to conditionality. A man who is subject to decay and subject to being conditioned has less freedom. A man who deals with the nature of decay as well as conditionality has more freedom. This means if there is no *bhava* (existences), there is no longer suffering at all, because suffering relates to the process of mental and physical

phenomena, the so-called *bhava* (existence). In this context, liberation from existence (*bhava*) and liberation from suffering (*dukkha*) is indeed *Nibbāna*. *Bhava* consists of three facets: *kāma-bhava* (plane of desire), *rūpa-bhava* (plane of form), and *arūpa-bhava* (plane of the formless). The statement of the *Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha* is: *dukkhaṃ tebhūmakam vaṭṭam, taṇhā samudayo bhava, nirodho nāma nibbānam. maggo lokuttaro mato* (the round of existence in the three planes is suffering, craving is its origin, cessation is *Nibbāna*. The path is regarded as supramundane).¹¹⁶

In the Buddhist cosmological context, *Nibbāna* seems to assume "non-existence," because it contains no process of existence. Existence here refers to the process of life and death. Any living being, who no longer belongs to the thirty-one planes of existence is named as being in "non-existence." Yet *Nibbāna* doesn't mean "non-existence," for it truly exists as a "transcendental state" that excludes the thirty-one planes of existence. Thus the view of existence (*bhava*) and the view of cessation of life and death (*Nibbāna*) amplify the clarity of the subject of this study. However, one might pose the question: "If everything including living beings is subject to decay and death, who is it that returns to existence?"

In regard to existence, so long as the results of *kamma* that one did in past previous lives still exist, one will continue to exist and will move from one existence to another. This is known as *saṃsāra* (cycle of life). *Kamma* (action)

in Pāli or *karma* in Sanskrit takes an important role in generating the function of the life process. Existence consists basically of two aspects: good existence (*sugati bhava*) which relates to wholesome deeds and bad existence (*duggati-bhava*) which relates to unwholesome deeds. These two aspects can be called heaven (*deva-loka*) and hell (*niraya-loka*). From the perspective of the world's religious texts or even those with just an oral tradition, almost all religions describe the concept of heaven and hell. The concept is presented in different ways depending upon the particular religious perspective. For example, heaven and hell are eternal in the Christian faith and the Muslim faith, while they are not eternal in Buddhism. Moreover, heaven is a place especially reserved for the good, while hell is a place reserved for the evil. The good are those who perform good deeds, while the evil are those who commit evil crimes.¹¹⁷

According to Winston King and Melford Spiro, there are two types of Buddhism: *Kammatic* Buddhism and *Nibbānic* Buddhism. *Kammatic* Buddhists believe that good *kamma* leads to better rebirth; *Nibbānic* Buddhists believe that meditation leads to escape from rebirth.¹¹⁸ However, in my view there should be three types of Buddhism: (1) *Kammic* Buddhism, (2) *Jhānic* Buddhism, and (3) *Nibbānic* Buddhism in accordance with theoretical and practical specifications. *Kammic* Buddhists attempt to avoid unwholesome deeds and perform good deeds in order to be born in fortunate existences, such as the human world and heaven. *Jhānic* Buddhists attempt to practice *samatha* (tranquility) meditation in

order to be born in a peaceful world, such as the *Brahma* (celestial) worlds, known as "*Brahma-loka*." The *jhānic* practitioners think that to obtain the opportunity to be born in *Brahma* worlds including the form and the formless existences, is a true blessing.

Nibbānic Buddhists, however, see the disadvantages of the views of *Kammic* and *Jhānic* Buddhists. The pleasure that they enjoy is indeed wonderful; however, it consists in many disadvantages for them. This is because if they make a mistake by doing unwholesome deeds due to the unlimited desire for pleasure and due to ignorance, that is due to craving associated with ignorance, their evil deeds will not allow them to enjoy life any longer in the sensuous and blissful existences. Unfortunately, their unwholesome deeds lead them to be reborn in hells or in other suffering worlds, including the world of ghosts and the animal kingdom. Moreover, although the enjoyment of heavenly pleasures is indeed wonderful, nonetheless one still is subject to aging, death, and suffering. Seeing these disadvantages, *Nibbānic* Buddhists make efforts in order to attain liberation from the undesirable sufferings of *samsāra*, that is the sufferings that exist in the thirty-one planes of existences.

The Concept of Existences For Living Beings

Buddhist cosmology deals with psychological and biological aspects of life. However, it is argued that unseen beings exist only in the mind. What can

we say about *Nibbāna*? Can it be said that it also exists only in the mind? There are so many skeptical doubts for those who have no experience in dealing with invisible beings. Therefore, it is necessary to analyze the perspective of Buddhist cosmology and to understand its significance in relationship to the existences of all living beings. According to Buddhist cosmology, the existences of living beings are fundamentally divided into three spheres (*bhūmi*). They are:

- (1) The Sphere of Desire (*kāma-bhūmi*) that contains the seven sensually pleasurable worlds and the four woeful worlds.
- (2) The Sphere of Form (*rūpa-bhūmi*) that contains the sixteen fine-material-sphere worlds.
- (3) The Formless Sphere (*arūpa-bhūmi*) that contains the four immaterial-sphere worlds.¹¹⁹

This is indeed a brief outline of Buddhist cosmology given to further elaborate upon the study of this research. Since some people are unable to see some of the realms of existence, such as the heavens and hells, and also *Nibbāna*, they assume that those realities exist only in the mind. In this context, it is wise to explain the conceptual framework of existence in Buddhism. First of all, we must attempt to understand the differences between conventional truth or relative truth (*sammuti-saccā*) and ultimate truth (*paramattha-saccā*).

Conventional truth is considered to be a truth that is generally used in daily life for communication. There are many modes of conventional expression utilizing relative truth. Woman, man, body, bed, seat, etc., are all examples of conventional truth or relative truth. "None of these are names of such 'really existent' *dhamma* (facts, phenomena, attributes) as mind, contact, extension,

cohesion, etc. . . . These names and their connotation, therefore, having but a conventional significance, are called modes of conventional expression, i.e. terms in common use."¹²⁰

Ultimate truth is a truth that is used for describing the essence of the *dhamma* (here *dhamma* refers to phenomena), such as the collection of aggregates: matter, feeling, perception, mental formation, and consciousness. Intrinsic reality is attributed to these phenomena. Ultimate truth is not merely a collective name, but implies that there is something, which really exists in accordance with Buddhist canonical texts. In this context, Ledi Sayādaw points out, "Conventional truth provides a safeguard against falsehood, and ultimate truth guards against hallucination."¹²¹ Regarding these two types of truths, the existence of beings and the existence of *Nibbāna* are considered under the categories of two truths respectively.

According to Buddhist literature, the two truths: *sammuti-saccā* (conventional truth) *paramattha-saccā* (ultimate truth) do not directly appear in Pāli canonical texts, but appear in that form only in commentaries.¹²² However, it is useful to apply the truths by commentarial methods: *nītattha* (explicit meaning or direct meaning) and *neyyattha* (implicit meaning or inferred meaning).¹²³ Yet the Buddha still used the conventional truth when he addressed his teachings to an audience in order to let the audience realize the essence of the *Dhamma*, which is related to the ultimate truth in his teachings. Regarding

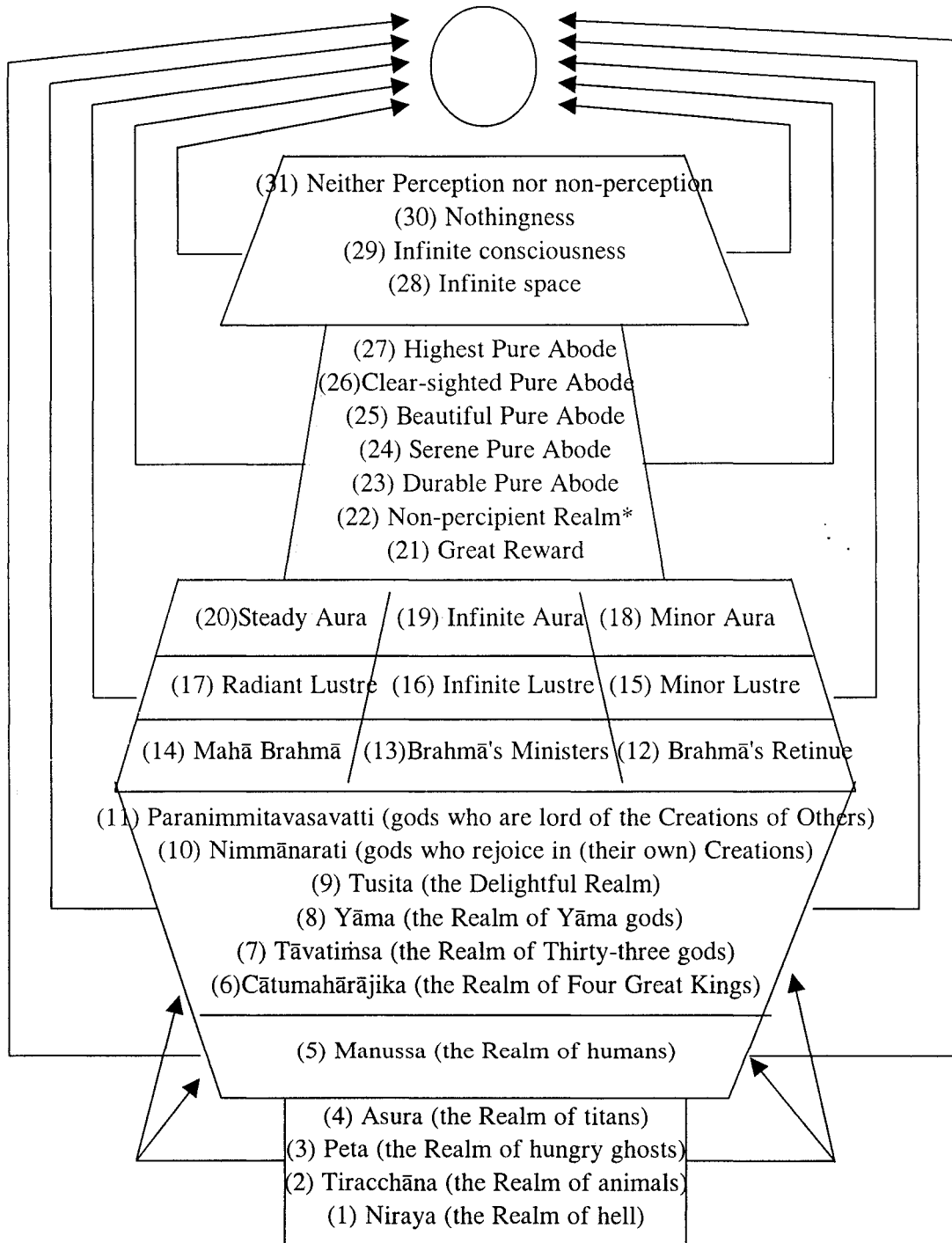
this matter it is stated: *samutisacca-mukheneva paramatthasaccādhigamo hoti* (dependent on *sammuti-saccā* [conventional truth], *paramattha-saccā* [ultimate truth] can be obtained).¹²⁴

From the point of view of the conventional truth, beings truly exist. However, in order to consider something as existent, it is necessary to prove it somehow. Buddhists scholars attempt to understand that "'to exist' means 'to be caused', 'to be conditioned', 'to be produced', or 'to be dependent on something'"¹²⁵ This is the basic concept of Buddhist thought to recognize the existence of beings. However, this concept is applied to conventional truth only, not to ultimate truth.

In this context, the aspects of existence are more related to the conventional truth, since it is related to living beings and the nature of *mata* (death) and *a-mata* (deathless). The nature of death is an essential property of living beings. Although there are many species, or varieties of living beings, they can be divided into two groups: visible living beings (*diṭṭha-satta*) and invisible living beings (*adiṭṭha-satta*). Buddhist cosmology attempts to elaborate on the different types of beings based on the thirty-one planes of existence. Buddhist traditions often use the aforementioned three realms of existence, which include seen and unseen beings. Yet in applying the thirty-one planes of existence to this work, the picture of life and death as well as the deathless state will be clearer in the psychological sense. The following chart is presented in

order to demonstrate how an individual in the thirty-one planes of existence is linked to *Nibbāna* in accordance with the *Abhidhammaṭṭha-saṅgaha* Pāli Text.

Table 1. *Nibbāna* and Thirty-One Planes of Existences in Theravāda Buddhism



Note: According to the *Abhidhamma* doctrines, one can visualize the Thirty-One-Planes of existence in this universe and a state of *Nibbāna* which is beyond this universe with no influence of worldly causality, but is mere transcendental. Thus the state of transcendental consciousness is named *lokuttara-citta* in the *Abhidhamma*. *Nibbāna* (absolute peace) can be realized via the transcendental consciousness. In the above chart, there are respectively eight levels in this universe. From the bottom to top, the first level is considered to be suffering existences, known as *duggati-bhūmi* (suffering-world). The second level is named as the human world, which is included in *sugati-bhūmi* (happy world). In fact, starting from human realm and above all the realms are called *sugati-bhūmi* (happy world). The third level is called *deva-bhūmi* (6-realms of celestial existence), while the fourth level, fifth level, sixth level, and seventh level are known as *Rūpa-Brahmā-bhūmi* (16-realms of Form or *Brahmā* worlds or heavenly worlds). And the eighth level is named as *Arūpa-Brahmā-bhūmi* (Four-Realms of the Formless *Brahmās* or Four Formless Worlds). Those who are born from the second level to the eighth level except these individuals: Double-rooted individual (*dvi-hetuka-puggala*) and Non-percipient individual (*asaññasatta-puggala*), have the potential to attain *Nibbāna* in this very life. However, in the bottom levels there is no way for those who are born in *duggati-bhūmi* (suffering world), also known as *apāya* (woeful planes) to attain *Nibbāna* in this life, but such beings will have the possibility to attain it in a next life. In reality, the state of *Nibbāna* goes beyond all levels of this universe, since it contains no rebirth and no death. Although *Nibbāna* has been visualized as that above all of the levels, it is not assumed that it exists above all of these levels. As a matter of fact, *Nibbāna* is excluded from the Thirty-One-planes of existences biologically and psychologically. Thus it is described as the "Transcendental State."¹²⁶

The above classification of the thirty-one planes of existences has been elaborated, based on Theravāda *Abhidhamma* texts. Some Mahāyāna texts also describe the types of existences, but the configuration of the universe and numerical sequences are different from Theravāda Buddhism. In Mahāyāna Buddhism, the existences are divided into forty-one realms.¹²⁷ However, both traditions accept the view that all living beings wander around in *saṃsāra*

tirelessly due to their attachment to existences. Eventually they will attain *Nibbāna*, when they have detachment to the existences.

Why do beings wander around aimlessly in these existences? This is the law of *kamma* operating. They have done wholesome and unwholesome things in the past as well as in the present existence through bodily, verbal, and mental actions. Beings are endlessly born in a particular realm due to *taṇhā* (desire) and *avijjā* (ignorance) in accordance with the doctrine of *Paṭiccasamuppāda* (Dependent Origination). In reality, when one passes away, the *kammic* force propels one to be reborn in a particular realm.

In terms of the concept of existences, as has been mentioned before, the modes of existence involve causes and effects, conditional circumstances, all dependent on one another. Since life and death are linked to one another, it is necessary to explore the causal relationship between individuals or beings in this life and beings in the next life. In Buddhism, going from this life to next life is called *gati*. It means "going" or "transmigration." Transmigration here doesn't mean "transmigration of soul," but it is the change of existences. *Gati* is primarily divided into two aspects: *puthujjana-gati* (the transmigration of the ordinary person) and *ariya-gati* (process of the Noble Ones). Within the division of *Puthujjana* (worldlings) there are two types: *kalyāṇa-puthujjana* (virtuous worldlings) and *andha-puthujjana* (deluded or blind worldlings). According to Buddhism, those who have not fully attained enlightenment will transmigrate to

one of the thirty-one planes of existence, but fully enlightened ones will enter *Nibbāna* after this life.

In this spiritual context, worldlings are uncertain as to their destination in these thirty-one planes of existence. Enlightened beings, excepting the fully enlightened ones (*Arahants*), but including those who have entered at the initial stage of the attainment of enlightenment (*magga-phala-ñāṇa*) or at the first of the eight stages of enlightenment (*Sotāpanna*), are quite certain to go to blissful existences (*sugati bhūmi*), also known as *ariyā-bhūmi* (realm of the Noble Ones). However, fully enlightened ones will go to the final *Nibbāna* after this life. In this regard, Ledi Sayādaw states as follows:

One cannot transmigrate into whatever kind of existence one might wish, but is liable to fall into any one of the 31 kinds of abodes or existences, according as one is thrown by one's past *kamma*. Just as, in the case of the fall of a coconut or of a palm-fruit from a tree, it cannot be ascertained beforehand where it will rest. So also in the case of the new existence of *puthujjana* (ordinary person) after his death, it cannot be ascertained beforehand whereunto he will transmigrate. Every creature that comes into life is inevitably laid in wait for by the evil of death (nature of death), and after his death he is also sure to fall by 'dispersion' into any existence.¹²⁸

Puthujjanas (worldlings) have to be reborn in one of thirty-one planes of existence in accordance with their own deeds. Yet, according to the *Nakhasikha Sutta*, *Saṃyutta Nikāya*, they are probaby reborn in the four realms of misery (*apāya*), because most beings perform more evil deeds than good deeds. The Buddha demonstrated the condition of existence of living beings, putting some

grains of dust upon his fingernail. He stated that those who are reborn in the four realms of misery (*apāya*) are more than those who are reborn in the abodes of men and *devas* (heavenly beings). It is like the few grains of dust upon the fingernail is less than all the dust in the universe due to the evil of *vinipātana-gati*, that is, the dispersion, the variety of possibilities of kinds of existences after death.¹²⁹

In the *Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha*, the commentator describes the link between individuals and the existences in a multitude of possibilities. Indeed, the Buddhist doctrines describe what level an individual can go to, what type of an existence based on the type of consciousness that one possesses. According to the *Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha*, there are twelve types of individuals (*puggalas*), which are inclined towards particular future existences due to the deeds they have performed, or due to insight as well as path and fruition wisdom that they have experienced through meditation.

Table 2 . The Twelve Individuals and Their Relationship To *Nibbāna*

(12) Individuals	Du	Su	(6) Heavens		(16) Forms of Bra			(4)	Nibbāna					
	AP	Ma	Ca	Remains-5	R-10	Asañña	Sudha	F-less	A	B	C	D	E	F
Duggati-ahe	+								<--->					+
Sugati-ahe		+	+			+			<--->					+
Dvi-hetuka		+	+	+					<--->					+
Ti-hetuka		+	+	+	+			+	<--->				+	
Sotā-magga		+	+	+	+				---			+		
Sotā-phala		+	+	+	+			+	---			+		
Saka-magga		+	+	+	+			+	---		+			
Saka-phala		+	+	+	+			+	---		+			
Anā-magga		+	+	+	+			+	---	+				
Anā-phala		+	+	+	+		+	+	---	+				
Arah-magga		+	+	+	+		+	+	---	+				
Arah-phala		+	+	+	+		+	+	---	+				

Key Words: *Duggati-ahe* = *Duggati-ahetuka-puggala* (Rootless individual in the Four woeful planes); *Sugati-ahe* = *Sugati-ahetuka-puggala* (Rootless individual in the sensual planes); *Dvi-hetuka* = *Dvi-hetuka-puggala* [(Double rooted individual--*alobha* (non-greedy) and *adosa* (non-ill will))]; *Ti-hetuka* = *Ti-hetuka-puggala* [(Triple-rooted individual -- *alobha* (non-greedy), *adosa* (non-ill will), and *amoha* (non-delusion))]; *Sotā-magga* = *Sotāpatti-magga-puggala* (the one realizing the path of Stream-winner); *Sotā-phala* = *Sotāpatti-phala-puggala* (the one realizing the fruition of Stream-winner); *Saka-magga* = *Sakadāgāmi-magga-puggala* (the one realizing the path of Once-returner); *Saka-phala* = *Sakadāgāmi-magga-puggala* (the one realizing the fruition of Once-returner); *Anā-magga* = *Anāgāmi-magga-puggala* (the one realizing the path of Non-returner); *Anā-phala* = *Anāgāmi-phala-puggala* (the one realizing the fruition of Non-returner); *Arah-magga* = *Arahatta-magga-puggala* (the one realizing the path of *Arahant*); and *Arah-phala* = *Arahatta-phala-puggala* (the one realizing the fruition of *Arahant*).

Du = *Duggati-bhūmi* (Suffering World); Su = *Sugati-bhūmi* (Happy World); Ap = *Apāya* (Four woeful states); Ma = *Manussa* (human beings); Ca = *Catumahārājika* (First heavenly world); R-10 = ten planes of Brahmā world except *asaññasatta-bhūmi* and five *Suddhāvāsa-bhūmi*: *asaññasatta-bhūmi* (non-percipient Realm); *Suddhāvāsa* = *bhūmi* (Pure Abodes); F-less = *Arūpa-bhūmi* (Formless).

Key Words in Second table:

A = *Arahant* (the fully enlightened being or suddenly enlightened being) who will enter *Nibbāna* after this life.

B = *Anāgāmī* (non-returner) who will enter *Nibbāna* after this immediate life, or even in this life (this is a figuration of possibility).

C = *Sakadāgāmī* (once-returner) who will enter *Nibbāna* after the second life, or even in this life (this is also a figuration of possibility).

D = *Sotāpanna* (Stream-winner) who will enter *Nibbāna* between one-seven lives, the maximum being seven lives, or even in this life (this is also a figuration of possibility).

E = *Kalyāna-puthujjana* (noble worldling) who has the potential to attain *Nibbāna* even in this life or in one of the unlimited future lives depending on his or her effort (this is also a figuration of possibility).

F = For the three remaining individuals it is impossible to attain *Nibbāna* in this very life, it is possible for them to attain *Nibbāna* in their future existences.¹³⁰

The Issue of Buddhist Cosmology

Regarding Buddhist cosmology, there arise some problematic issues;

whether the Buddha talked about the concept of Buddhist cosmology or not;

whether existences represented in the Buddhist literature truly exist or not.

Jotiya Dhirasekera who was an editor of the *Encyclopaedia of Buddhism*, Vol.

IV, points out that in the earliest Buddhist literature, cosmological speculation

seems to be spoken of with disapproval by the Buddha, referring to the

Brahmajāla Sutta, Dī-N, and the statement of the Elder Mālunkya-putta who

asked the Buddha whether the world is eternal or not. In this context, the Buddhist doctrines carefully deal with this statement of the Buddha's advice.¹³¹ According to the statements of Buddhist cosmology, there are four ways of answering questions. They are: (1) the question which is to be answered with a direct reply (*ekam̐sabyākaranīya-pañhā*), (2) the question which is to be answered with an analysis or an explanation (*vibhajja byākaranīya-pañhā*), (3) the question which is to be answered with a counter-question (*paṭipucchābyākaranīya-pañhā*), and (4) the question which is to be set aside (rejected) (*thāpanīya-pañhā*).¹³²

The first question deals with such matters as the five aggregates (form/matter, feeling, perception, mental formations and consciousness); "Are they impermanent or not?" Secondly, the question is associated with such issues as the aspects of mind and matter; "Is the impermanent element a matter?" Thirdly, the question is linked to such issues as the aspects of analysis; "Is everything discriminated or known by the eye?" Lastly, the question deals with regard to such matters as this: "Is the world eternal . . . not eternal . . . finite . . . infinite . . . both . . . neither? Is the soul the same as the body? Is the soul one thing and the body another? Does the Tathāgata (Buddha) exist after death, or does he not exist after death, or does he both exist and not exist after death, or does he neither exist nor not exist after death?" Based on these conditions, the Buddha did not answer the question of the elder Mālunkyaputta. Yet one may

feel "Why did the Buddha put such a question aside?" This is because "there is no reason or ground for answering it. There is no utterance or speech of the Buddhas, (the Blessed Ones), that is without reason, without ground."¹³³

Although the Buddha did not answer the elder Mālunkyaṇḍita's questions, the Buddha did talk about the universe and Buddhist cosmology. He also taught the subject of existence and non-existence occasionally, when it was beneficial for others. However, the Buddha carefully differentiated the view of proximate cause (*padatthāna*) and the view of remote causes or the "endless beginning" of the world (*anādhika-loka*), when he talked about the universe and how it became manifested. Yet many people think that the Buddha refused to talk about cosmology and the universe, because in the earliest Buddhist literature cosmological speculation seems to be spoken of with disapproval by the Buddha. There are two main reasons that contribute to speculation as to why the Buddha did not talk about the universe. One reason is that the Buddhist scriptures are so constituted and composed in such a way that very little attention is given to the paradigm of the World System. And the second reason is that the Buddha refused to make a declaration on the cosmological problems of the eternity or infinity of the world, when the Elder Mālunkyaṇḍita asked him those questions, such as "Is the world eternal? Is the world not eternal?" and so on.¹³⁴ If one reflects on only this source of the Buddha's statement associated with the Elder Mālunkyaṇḍita, one might misinterpret that the Buddhist literature seems to

disapprove of investigation into the composition of the world system and cosmology. In reality, the Buddha did not ignore in his teachings the Buddhist cosmology that is expressed in the thirty-one planes of existence.

There is one piece of evidence that supports the fact that the Buddha addressed the issue of Buddhist cosmology. In the *Aggañña Sutta*, Dh-N, the Buddha gave the following statement to describe how the world together with living beings is formed with initial rain drops, developed, sustained, and destroyed by fire, water, and wind together.

There comes a time, Vasettha, when, sooner or later after a long period, this world contracts. At a time of contraction, beings are mostly born in the *Ābhassara Brahmā World*. And there they dwell, mind-made, feeding on delight, self-luminous, moving through the air, glorious -- and they stay like that for a very long time. But sooner or later, after very long period, this world begins to expand again. At a time of expansion, the beings from the *Ābhassara Brahmā World*, having passed away from there; they are mostly reborn in this world. Here they dwell, mind-made, feeding on delight, self-luminous, moving through the air, glorious -- and they stay like that for a very long time. . . . Then some being of a greedy nature said: "I say what can this be?" and tasted the savory earth on its finger. In so doing, it became taken with the flavor, and craving arose in it. . . . And the result of this was that their self-luminance disappeared. And as a result of the disappearance of their self-luminance, the moon and the sun appeared, night and day were distinguished, months and fortnights appeared, and the year and its seasons. To that extent the world re-evolved.¹³⁵

Based on the above statement, there is no doubt that the Buddha talked about Buddhist cosmology and the origin of this universe. It is obvious that the Buddha addressed the issue of the universe and how it initially formed through the natural process. It is believed that the universe consists of multiple world

systems and a variety of living beings, but the universe is changed from time to time. And then the process of the universe is understood as the cycle of increasing and decreasing periods. The cycle of a world-period is an inconceivably long space of time, known as aeons (*kappa* or *kalpa* in Sanskrit).

The Buddhist texts speak of three kinds of aeon -- an interim aeon, an incalculable aeon, and a great aeon. An interim aeon (*antarakappa*) is the period of time required for the lifespan of human beings to rise from ten years to the maximum of many thousands of years, and then fall back to ten years. Twenty such interim aeons equal one incalculable aeon (*asankheyyakappa*), and four incalculable aeons constitute one great aeon (*mahākappa*). The length of a great aeon is said by the Buddha to be longer than the time it would take for a man to wear away a mountain of solid granite one *yojana* (about 7-8 miles) high and wide by stroking it once every hundred years with a silk cloth.¹³⁶

The duration of one great aeon thus accounted for is in accordance with the *Abhidhamma* text as well. Indeed, the duration of one great aeon is so long that no one can exactly count its length because the world-period extends to what seem infinite numbers.

The process of the cycle of formation and destruction of the universe involves four periods. They are: the period of Dissolution (*samvatta*), the period of Nothingness or Continuation of Chaos (*samvattathāyī*), the period of Formation or Creation (*vivatta*) and the period of Continuation of the Formed World (*vivattathāyī*). Of the four classifications of the world, the period of Dissolution began, when fire, water, and wind destroyed the world. During the dissolution of the world, almost all beings were released from the hells and

other worlds and were reborn in the world of human beings. Then some of them could be reborn in the First *Jhāna* realm, some second *Jhāna* realm and some third *Jhāna* realm in accordance with their stages of *Jhāna* consciousness. And then they were eventually able to enter higher *samādhi* states through tranquility meditation so that they were able to be reborn in the fourth *Jhāna* realm where fire, water, and wind could not destroy them.¹³⁷

However, according to the *Abhidharmakosa*, some inhabitants of hells whose evil *kamma* has not been fully released yet, that is, their full measure of punishment was not over, would be transferred to a hell which exists in another universe.¹³⁸ The process of the world dissolution takes place in one world after another in different stages by a natural process. Yet there is one philosophical, but not canonical view that seems to be controversial in Buddhism. The issue is that there is no beginning of this universe as well as no beginning of all beings. This means that there is a beginning before that beginning and the beginning before that beginning etc. This concept is known as "endless beginning." This view is directly related to the doctrine of "Dependent Origination" (*paṭicca-samuppāda*). The process of the world or the process of beings and how one becomes a form is just based on this present world. However the universe is conceived to be vast almost beyond human capability to comprehend. There are many worlds or universes that are beyond human perception or even the penetration of human science.

Beings have to move around in the life cycle (*saṃsāra*) due to ignorance and craving in accordance with Dependent Origination. The Buddha addressed the concept of beings, forced through ignorance and craving, to wander in *saṃsāra* in the following way: "Bhikkhu, this *saṃsāra* is without discoverable beginning. A first point is not discerned of beings roaming and wandering on hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving."¹³⁹ Reading the above statement, one can understand how the Buddha emphasizes that the process of the universe contains "no beginning." In this context, the Buddha is more concerned with the process of liberation from the world of suffering rather than the concept of creation, or how or why the world began, and who created this universe. Yet he described the existences of living beings in order to teach his moral ethics to his followers so that they would have more opportunity of going where they wished to go.

The Two Views about the Beginning of the World System

In regard to how the world or the universe is initially formed, there are the two views similar to one another. The two views are: the scientists' view and the Buddhists' view. They are closely related to one another. First, the two views deny that God is the basic origin of reality. Secondly, both viewpoints indicate that the world or the universe is formed due to natural processes. Lastly, the

natural processes take place by themselves without having any influence of God or creators to form this world.

Regarding the view of how the world is formed, many scientists state that they have proof that some original substance is itself able to develop into complex beings due to physical evolution, chemical evolution, biological evolution, or cosmic evolution. However, Buddhism has no proof about the formation of the world physically, but Buddhism does posit some ideas theoretically. Yet the Buddhists' view about the formation of the world is very close to scientists' view. The view of scientists is the following:

Many scientists believe that in the giant laboratory of the earth (over four billion years ago) elements of carbon, hydrogen, oxygen and nitrogen had combined to form complex molecules. In the process perhaps a particular combination might have triggered off the most intriguing and fascinating process called "life". The material basis could be a polymer, called protein, which got synthesized from simple chemical compounds like methane, ammonia and carbon dioxide. The life thus began, got further evolved through the ages till it became "human." The polymer could be a few billion years old but human beings are the new comers in the universe (about 100,000 years ago).¹⁴⁰

From time to time, a certain process of evolution occurs on the giant earth. The earth's crust was formed and the cosmic evolution occurred in this universe. According to scientific view, the concept of this evolution is called the "Big Bang" theory. The observations in the "Big Bang" theory are similar to Buddhist views. Buddhist texts describe a world that eventually became intensely hot and seven suns appeared one after another almost at the same time, when the

world was about to explode. Then the heat burnt up the whole world.¹⁴¹

Scientists believe that the process of "Big Bang" approximately occurred 13 billion years ago. A series of changes took place on the face of the universe over a longer period of time. The series of changes include macro-evolution, chemical evolution, biological evolution and psychological evolution. Many scientists believe that the origin of human beings is the product of two different processes, which were taking place simultaneously, that is the biological evolution and the psychological evolution. Indeed biological evolution is complex, complicated and controversial when it concerns human beings.¹⁴² Yet theists still persist in holding their views that the universe and beings began to form and exist in this world because of "the will of God." However, Buddhists and scientists believe that the universe and beings took place due to the processes of nature; in scientific terms, this is known as "natural selection."

In this regard, Buddhists do not seriously talk about the theory of the beginning of the universe like scientists, since it is believed that there is no beginning and no being who creates everything including the universe and beings. Although Buddhists do not provide facts about the beginning of the universe through experiments, they accept the statements of scientists, which are agreeable to their doctrines. In this context, scientists provide the view of the beginning of the universe as follows:

We are used to the idea that events are caused by earlier events, which in turn are caused by still earlier events. There is a chain of causality stretching back into the past. But suppose this chain has a beginning. Suppose there was a first event. What caused it? This was not a question that many scientists wanted to address. They tried to avoid it, either by claiming, like the Russians, that the universe didn't have a beginning or by maintaining the origin of the universe did not lie within the realm of science but belonged to metaphysics or religion. In my opinion, this is not a position any true scientist should take. If the laws of science are suspended at the beginning of the universe, might not they fail at other times also? A law is not a law if it only holds sometimes. We must try to understand the beginning of the universe on the basis of science. It may be a task beyond our powers, but we should at least make the attempt. While the theorems that Penrose and I proved showed that the universe must have had a beginning, they didn't give much information about the nature of that beginning. They indicated that the universe began in a big bang, a point where the whole universe, and everything in it, was crunched up into a single point of infinite density. At this point, Einstein's general theory of relativity would have broken down, so it left with the origin of the universe apparently being beyond the scope of science.¹⁴³

Since no scientist has come up with a theory that is related to the hypothesis of the beginning of the universe yet, it would be better to release one's persistent curiosity about the issue of the origin of the universe. However, it is generally said that evolution is a theory that is a kind of model to explain how beings and the universe have changed due to "natural selection."¹⁴⁴

The Existence of *Duggati-Bhūmi* (Suffering World)

Regarding the existences of seen and unseen beings, the existences where suffering beings find rebirth are known as the four woeful states (*apāya*), also called *duggati-bhūmi*, the sphere of the "Woeful Course of existence." *Niraya*

(hell), *peta* (hungry ghosts), *asura* (demons or titans), and *tiracchāna* (animals) are under the classification of *apāya*. According to Buddhist cosmology, *apāya* (woeful planes) are undesirable planes for Buddhists. The word *apāya* is the combination of two words: *apa* (devoid) + *aya* (happiness). Thus *apāya* literally means devoid of happiness. This is the collective name for those realms of existence in which there exists pain and misery all the time. Hence there is no happiness for those who are born in the four woeful planes. In fact, if one truly sees the suffering of the world, one is enthusiastic to attain liberation; that is *Nibbāna* in Buddhist perspective.¹⁴⁵

Of the four woeful planes, hell (*niraya*) is the most undesirable existence in Buddhism. *Niraya* (*naraka* in Sanskrit) literally means devoid of happiness or the downward-path. The group of major hells contains the eight great hells, while minor hells are counted as forty in number. That is because each major hell contains five minor hells in accordance with *Devadūta sutta*, *Majjhima-Nikāya* as well as the *Abhidhammasaṅgaha-bhāsāṭīkā*. The hells are located under human plane somewhere in the universe. The tortured beings suffer perpetually in the hells having no interruption in their agony. There is no rest from the most intense suffering. They have to suffer due to their evil deeds done in past lives. Knowing these kinds of things, Buddhists are very much afraid of rebirth in that suffering world. As a result, they spiritually aim for liberation by practicing generosity (*dāna*), morality (*sīla*), and wisdom (*paññā*).

However, unlike other religions, Buddhism points out that those who suffer in the hells will not suffer forever, since nothing is eternal. Yet those who suffer in one of the hells are extremely horrified, because they cannot die either, although they have to endure so much torturing in the hell.¹⁴⁶

How painful is it in the hell? There is a record in the *Devadūta sutta*, *Majjhima-Nikāya*. For instance,

They drive a red-hot iron stake through one hand, . . . the other hand, . . . one foot, . . . the other foot, they drive a red-hot iron stake through his belly. There they feel painful, racking, piercing feelings. Yet they do not die so long as that evil action has not exhausted its result.¹⁴⁷

In the *Sutta*, there are more detailed explanations of the suffering of hells. Hence one can go further studying and learning more about how much suffering there is in the hells. They are really scary and frightening to us. Having learned about such horrible sufferings as the beings endure in their existences in hell, Buddhists wish to attain *Nibbāna*. Yet these beings in hell will eventually have the opportunity to be released from the horrible suffering of that world, when the consequences of evil *kamma* are over.

Among the eight layers of the hells, *Avīci* is the bottom-most hell and the most horrific. According to Buddhism, those who commit the most serious evil deeds, known as, weighty *kamma* (*garuka-kamma*), have to suffer in *Avīci*. The weighty *kamma* cannot be replaced by any other kind of *kamma* to mitigate the situation for rebirth in a better existence. No good deeds can help those who

intentionally commit the five heinous crimes (*pañca-ānantarīya-kamma*) to escape from *Avīci*. The five heinous crimes are: *pitughāta* (patricide), *mātughāta* (matricide), *arahantaghāta* (the murder of an *Arahant* or Noble One), *lohitupādaka* (the wounding of a Buddha), and *sangha-bhedaka* (maliciously creating a split among the *Sangha*, members of the Order). For example, we may note the case of the Buddha's cousin, Devadatta. Since he committed the two heinous crimes: wounding the Buddha and causing a schism in the *Sangha*, he lost his psychic powers and was reborn in the *Avīci* hell.¹⁴⁸

The animal realm (*tiracchāna*) exists in one of the woeful planes and ghosts (*peta*) and demons or titans (*asuras*) are also under the category of the woeful planes. They are indeed considered to be horrific existences of endless sufferings due to evil *kamma*. The word *tiricchāna* means kinds of beings that move horizontally. Animals can live everywhere, such as on the earth or in the water, or even in the sky. It is believed that human beings that commit evil deeds might be reborn in the animal kingdom after death due to the power of the evil *kammic* force. When one is reborn in the animal kingdom, it is difficult to escape from that realm of existence. This is because the animals do not have much opportunity to gain merits; also they seldom show mercy to one another; the stronger one usually tortures the weaker one. They rarely have opportunities to perform meritorious deeds in their lives especially compared to human

beings. According to Buddhism, only good deeds enable beings to escape from the suffering world.¹⁴⁹

The word *peta* (*preta* in Sanskrit) means ghosts or spirits. It also means "the departed or spirit of the dead." It has also been often translated as "hungry ghost." Hungry ghosts are beings who are tormented by intense hunger and thirst due to past *kamma*. They cannot find relief from *kammic* suffering, until they get some help from people through transference of merits. The hungry ghosts have no particular world of their own. They live in the same world as human beings, but ordinarily humans cannot see them. They live in forests, on the earth, in cemeteries or in the oceans. They have a great diversity of forms and eat varieties of food, such as any kind of leftover food, excrement, mucus, and pus. Some hungry spirits eat large amounts of food. However, they are not able to find relief for their hunger. Thus, they are named as "hungry ghosts." They remain invisible to humans unless they want to display themselves. As an exception, those who possess the divine eye or divine psychic power (*dibba-cakkhu*) can see the hungry spirits at any time.¹⁵⁰ Regarding the position of "the king of death," according to *Devadūta Sutta*, *Majjhima-Nikāya*, *Yāma*, known as "the king of death," is residing in the realm of *peta*. *Yāma* is also known as the king of the realm of hungry spirits.¹⁵¹

According to Buddhism, *asuras* are also fearful, evil and terrifying creatures inhabiting one of the lower worlds. That realm is found within woeful

planes. The word *asura* is often translated as demons, titans and evil ghosts. Some *asuras* use their power for evil purposes. These *asuras* are sometimes put under classification of *petas* when the woeful planes are counted as three. Pāli literature sometimes describes three realms in the woeful plane, placing the *asuras* under the category of *petas* in those accounts. There are many types of *asuras*. Some *asuras* dwell in the rivers; some are in the oceans and some on the mountains. However, those *asuras* who live at the bottom of Mount Sumeru are those most commonly known as the *asuras* in Buddhism. This is because these *asuras* once combatted the gods of the Tāvātimsa heaven. According to Theravāda Buddhist scriptures, once the Tāvātimsa heaven belonged to the *asuras* before the Tāvātimsa gods chased them down to the bottom of Sumeru out of the Tāvātimsa heaven. For this reason, these *asuras* are indeed godlike, but they are not considered to be gods any longer. This is the reason why all the above mentioned beings are classified under the suffering world (*apāya*).¹⁵² Seeing those who have so much suffering in the hells through the teaching of the Buddha, at first beings wish to be born in a heavenly existence to enjoy themselves comfortably and then they wish to go to *Nibbāna*.

The Existence of *Sugati-Bhūmi* (Happy World)

Human beings (*manussas*) and heavenly beings (*devas*) are counted as the existences of *Sugati-Bhūmi*. *Sugati* here means "happy course of existence"

and *bhūmi* means "sphere" or "planes." The human realm is among one of the seven sensuous blissful planes (*kāma-sugati-bhūmi*). Human beings possess great pleasures and much enjoyment compared to the beings of the lower planes. In reality, the human realm is a mixture of both pain and pleasure. Buddhists know their position in the cosmic plane, how to avoid pain, and how to gain pleasure and happiness occasionally. Moreover, they have the opportunity to attain mundane and even supramundane happiness (the happiness of the state of *Nibbāna*). Furthermore, they can even obtain *Buddhahood* through mental development (*bhāvanā*), determination (*paṇihita*) and resolution (*adhiṭṭhāna*). Since the human realm possesses a lot of opportunities to practice good deeds and charity, it is considered to be a gateway to go to every existence that is wished for. In the Buddhist perspective, heaven is considered to be a blissful plane (*sugati-bhūmi*).¹⁵³

Heavenly beings are residing in particular heavens, which are located on the part of Mount *Sumeru* that appears above the sea and above the human world. Mount *Sumeru* is surrounded by seven mountain ranges. There are six realms including that of the Four Great Kings, which are called the sense-sphere heavens and the abodes of the higher *devas* (gods). The heavenly beings or gods have a longer lifespan than the lifespan of human beings and a richer variety of sensual pleasures than humans. Yet all the possessions of these gods are inevitably impermanent. The lowest realm of the heavenly worlds is the realm

of the Four Great Kings, known as Cātumahārājika heaven. It is the dwelling place or the realm of the Four Great Kings along with their servants. According to Theravāda tradition, the lifespan of the four great kings is 500 celestial years (C.Y.).¹⁵⁴

In the *Vibhanga* text, the commentator mentions that one celestial day of the Cātumahārājika heaven is equal to fifty human years. In the Tāvātimsa heaven (the second abode of the celestial realm), one celestial day is equal to one hundred human years. In the Yāma heaven (the third abode of the celestial realm), it is two hundred human years, in the Tusita heaven (the fourth abode of the celestial realm), it is four hundred human years and so on. Buddhists believe that the *Bodhisatta* (Buddha-to-be) is living in the Tusita heaven. In this way, the lifespans of the six heavenly worlds are differently computed. For instance, the lifespan of the Cātumahārājika heaven is understood as 500 celestial years. Therefore the lifespans of the four great kings equal 9 million human years. [(1 day = fifty human years) / (1 year + 360 days) / (500 C.Y.) = 9,000,000].¹⁵⁵

Regarding celestial beings, it is believed that deities are indeed mystical beings, known as *opapātika-satta*. The word *opapātika* literally means "accidental or spontaneously born" and *satta* is translated as "living being." This means that such beings were reborn without the instrumentality of parents, that is, there is no pregnancy in these realms. These kinds of birth are common to all celestial beings as is recorded in the Buddhist texts. In general, there are four

kinds of birth, namely, womb-born beings (*jalābuja*), egg-born beings (*aṇḍaja*), moisture-born beings (*saṁsedaja*) and spontaneously born beings (*opapātika*).¹⁵⁶ Since heavenly beings were born in the heaven as spontaneously born beings, the male deities are at the age of twenty, while female deities are at the age of sixteen, from the beginning of their birth. This characteristic applies to all sensuous heavenly beings. Moreover, heavenly beings live in comfortable conditions. Everything is special for them because of their good deeds in the past. They enjoy themselves in heavenly abodes with heavenly food, sexual pleasures and delightful gardens living in wonderful conditions so that they have great satisfaction with almost everything without ever feeling tired.¹⁵⁷

Like other religions, Buddhism describes heavenly inhabitants as the most wonderful beings from the point of view of the religious perspective. Nonetheless, these beings remain unseen by most of humankind. However, the heavenly beings are subject to the conditions of life just as other living beings. If the beginning of a life starts with birth, then the end of a life ends in death. It is obvious that the nature of death is an unfavorable condition for all beings. Weeping, crying, sorrow and separation are the consequences of death. Seeing some disadvantages in the heavenly life as it also is yoked to the suffering of death and the uncertainty of rebirth, *Nibbānic* Buddhists are fervent to attain *Nibbāna*. Hence they show no interest in heavenly existences, since they learn that the heavenly beings have no escape from aging, sickness and death.

There is, however, no doubt that Buddhists talk about the structure of the universe or cosmology occasionally. In the Buddhist texts it is reported that mysterious and mystical inhabitants are living on the earth, in hells or in heavens. Moreover, Buddhism accepts the existence of the realms of Brahma (gods) like Hinduism, but deals with it from a different perspective. The realms of form, known as the fine-material sphere (*rūpa-bhūmi*) and the realm of the formless, known as the immaterial sphere (*arūpa-bhūmi*) are the places for *jhāna* (*dhyāna*, in Sanskrit) practitioners. Those who have developed *jhāna* will be reborn in the realm of form or in the formless realm dependent upon the *jhāna* attained, accordingly. From the viewpoint of Buddhist schools, those who live there are still under the category of the realm of desire. Yet they do not speak of the realm of form as the realm of desire, because those who reside in those realms have gained release from sensual desires for long duration through the power of *jhāna* meditation. The realm of form is divided into four planes based on the *jhāna* states, that is the first through the fourth *jhānas*. Each *jhāna* plane consists of three abodes, except the fourth *jhāna* plane, which contains five abodes. According to Buddhist perspectives, Brahmas dwell in the abodes according to their *jhāna* levels, there being the first *jhāna* through the eighth *jhāna*.¹⁵⁸

In the universe, some beings are indeed beyond one's imagining. Usually people think of living beings as having forms and shapes, because most beings

have forms with different sizes and shapes. However, these gods have no forms, and are known as *arūpa-brahma*. This immaterial-sphere plane of the formless is fourfold. There are: the realm of infinite space, the realm of infinite consciousness, the realm of nothingness and the realm of neither-perception nor non-perception. To take rebirth in these planes, one needs to possess an immaterial meditative attainment. Each immaterial attainment leads to rebirth into the corresponding realm. Those beings born in the realm of the formless possess no kind of material form, but only life-continuum consciousness, this means that they possess mind only. The lifespan of the gods who have attained the highest *jhāna*-state, that is, neither-perception nor non-perception is 84,000 aeons.¹⁵⁹

Regarding the realms of Brahma, Brahmins believe that Brahma is originally a Brahmanic god of the Hindu religion. They assume that Mahābrahmā is the highest being in this universe, because he created this world together with living beings, non-living beings and everything. As a matter of fact, the concept of *Brahma* in Hinduism and the concept of *brahma* in Buddhism are closely intertwined. However, Hindus believe in Brahma as a creator of the universe, while Buddhists believe in *brahma* as just a celestial god who has no power to create the universe. For Hinduism, the life of Brahma or the Supreme Soul is eternal, but for Buddhism there is no Brahma who lives in a Brahma world forever. In addition, what religious liberation means for Hindus is

purification of the individual soul until there is the attainment of union with the Supreme Soul, while what the religious liberation means for Buddhists is to attain *Nibbāna*, supreme peace.¹⁶⁰ To reach the Brahma world is considered to be the final goal for Hindus, but for Buddhists, *Nibbāna* is their final goal. However, another issue is debated here: What happens to those who have attained *Nibbāna*, after their death? This study will discuss this issue in detail in Chapter 4.

The Consequences of Life and Death

Canonical doctrines clearly describe that there is a connection between life and death, death and rebirth, *kammic* force (energy of volitional action), and its consequences. According to the *Abhidhamma*, the rebirth-linking consciousness (*paṭisandhi-citta*), life-continuum consciousness (*bhavanga-citta*), and the death consciousness (*cuti-citta*) are interconnected to one another in one (particular) life. However, the rebirth-linking consciousness in this life will not be the same as the rebirth-linking consciousness in the next life due to the different roles of the process of *kamma*. However, the *kammic* force will monitor rebirth-linking consciousness in the next life. There is no personality monitoring the *kammic* function in this matter, but just that force itself. It is known as "the law of *kamma*" (*kamma-niyāma*). With respect to this law of *kamma*, there are four distinct kinds of *kamma*, which are likely to generate the

order of the effects of *kamma* in taking on the role of producing rebirth-linking in the next existence.¹⁶¹

*Paṭisandhi bhavangañ ca tathā cavanamānasam,
Ekameva tatheveka-vasayañceka jātiyam.*¹⁶²

The rebirth-linking consciousness, life-continuum consciousness, and the death consciousness in one (particular) birth are similar and have an identical object.¹⁶³

In terms of the view of *kammic* force, these four kinds of *kamma* will take place dependent upon the potency of the previously performed actions they represent. The consequences of those actions act in the role of enforcing the *kammic* law that monitors the generation of rebirth-linking consciousness in the next existence. The four kinds of *kamma* are (1) weighty *kamma* (*garuka-kamma*), (2) death-proximate *kamma* (*āsannaka-kamma*), (3) habitual *kamma* (*āciṇṇaka-kamma*) and (4) reserve *kamma* (*kaṭattā-kamma*). Of these four, the first one is most the powerful and its function takes first priority in the order of the role of enforcement of *kammic* law. This *kammic* law monitors the generation of rebirth-linking consciousness in the next existence. However, if the first one is weak, then the second one will take place in the rebirth-linking process and so on. In this process, weighty *kamma* holds powerful moral weight so that other *kamma* cannot replace it as a determinant of rebirth. The weighty *kamma* can be measured in two ways: the wholesome dimension (*kusala-kamma*) and the unwholesome dimension (*akusala-kamma*). On the wholesome

side, the attainment of a state of *jhāna* is considered to be weighty *kamma*, while on the unwholesome side, the five heinous crimes and a fixed wrong view that denies the basis for morality are also considered to be weighty *kamma*. The act of Devadatta aforementioned is an illustration of this matter.¹⁶⁴

Death-proximate *kamma* will take its function in order to monitor the role of generating rebirth-linking consciousness in the next existence, unless there is the presence of the power of the weighty *kamma*. How does the death-proximate *kamma* perform its function? The deeds that are done shortly or just before death will take a function as a second priority for the last consciousness or the death consciousness (*cuti-citta*) in order to link into the rebirth consciousness in the next life. Let us say that a person who mostly has done bad deeds in this life fortunately remembers and reflects upon the good deed that he or she performed just before his or her dying state. That good deed will enable him or her to have a better chance to gain a fortunate rebirth. For this reason, in Buddhist tradition, it is customary to help a dying person by reminding him or her of his or her good deeds. Or the dying person is encouraged listen to *paritta* (selected *suttas*) chanting in order to arouse wholesome thoughts. Or the dying person is urged to meditate, if he or she has been meditating in daily life, in order to develop a peaceful mind during the last moments of life.¹⁶⁵

In reality, religious people usually prefer to generate habitual *kamma* in their religious lives. This is because they believe that the habitual *kamma* is

more reliable for an ordinary person to maintain one's spiritual development in a better rebirth. The habitual *kamma* is a kind of deed that one habitually practices or performs. This habitual *kamma* generates its function, if there is absence of the weighty *kamma* as well as potent death-proximate *kamma*.

Finally, reserve *kamma* is a *kamma* that includes any other deeds, that is the deeds not included in the three aforementioned categories. This means that any kind of deeds that are not accounted for in the aforementioned three types of *kamma*, but are deeds that still have sufficient potency to function in the role of generating rebirth consciousness. This reserve *kamma* also takes its function, when there is the absence of the functions of the aforementioned three types of *kamma*.¹⁶⁶

Buddhism attempts to understand life after death emphasizing the dying process and the experiences of the dying person. According to the *Abhidhamma*, those who are about to die will experience one of the following conditions via any of the six sense doors, that is, eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind door at the moment of death. The possible conditions are:

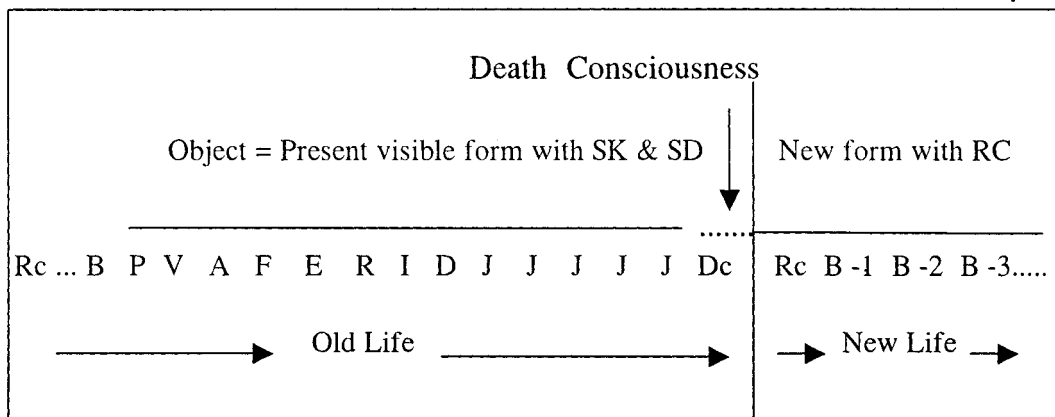
- (1) A *kamma* that is to produce rebirth-linking in the next existence, according to circumstances, confronts (the dying person); or
- (2) A sign of *kamma* (*kamma-nimitta*), that is, a form, etc., which has been apprehended previously at the time of performing the *kamma* or something that was instrumental in performing the *kamma*; or
- (3) A sign of destiny (*gati-nimitta*), that is, (a symbol of the state) to be obtained and experienced in the immediately following existence.¹⁶⁷

Regarding the above statement, the sign of *kamma* includes the types of objects, such as knives, guns and any kinds of weapons that one used, while one was committing a crime. Similarly, in the wholesome dimension, the kinds of objects that one performed the meritorious deeds with, such as foods, clothes and medicines may appear in the mind of the dying person just before the moment of death. Furthermore, the sign of destiny may manifest as various kinds of visions. Such visions may appear as evil signs like the horrible fires of hell, horrific guardians of hell and fearful black dogs, all pointing to an evil destiny. Similarly the opposite kind of visions may appear. Such visions as heavenly signs with beautiful deities, heavenly gardens and beautiful music, all being auspicious for a heavenly destiny.¹⁶⁸ These bad signs or good signs can be experienced by those who are very close to reaching the death consciousness (*cuti-citta*) in a life. Nevertheless, the mind process of the dying person just before the final consciousness is not considered to be the death consciousness (*cuti-citta*). In reality, the death consciousness takes place at the end of a particular existence and then rebirth-linking consciousness occurs in the new life.

For a dying person, if he or she is still an ordinary person (*puthujjana*), the process of his or her death consciousness is likely to attach to the new existence. That process of death consciousness and *kamma* incline towards the

process of rebirth-linking consciousness, when the old existence is just about to end. As soon as the death consciousness passes over, the rebirth consciousness spontaneously takes place in the new life. This is the basic foundation in understanding how the process of the death consciousness takes place and how the rebirth-linking consciousness occurs. The following process is the process of death-rebirth cognitive consciousness (*paṭisandhi-citta*) in accordance with the *Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha* that elaborates the process of mind in *Marañāsanna-vīthi* (the process of death rebirth cognitive consciousness).¹⁶⁹

Table 3. The Process of Death and Rebirth Consciousness
(*Marañāsanna-vīthi*)



Key Words: SK = sign of *kamma*; SD = sign of destiny; Rc = Rebirth consciousness; B = stream of *bhavanga* (life-continuum consciousness); P = past *bhavanga*; V = vibrational *bhavanga*; A = arrested *bhavanga*; F = five-door adverting; E = eye consciousness; R = receiving consciousness; I = investigation consciousness; D = determining consciousness; J = *javana* (*kammic* function consciousness or active phase of cognitive process); Dc = death consciousness; Rc = Rebirth consciousness of new life.

According to the *Abhidhamma*, the death consciousness and rebirth consciousness are very closely related to one another, but they are not counted as one single entity, and they are not eternally linked to one another, but they are linked to one another as a process. The process of consequences as cause and effect generates the *kammic* energy to propel the death consciousness into rebirth consciousness in a new life carrying along the *kamma* of one life into the next life. For this reason, Buddhists attempt to perform meritorious deeds for better rebirth. At the same time they attempt to avoid evil deeds to protect themselves in order not to go again to the four woeful existences (*apāya*). Based on this concept, it is important for Buddhists to remind a dying person of his or her good deeds, or to urge him or her to meditate, if that person is a meditator, in order to get peaceful mind at that moment, before departing from this life. As a matter of fact, the process of life and death is not really something mystical in human life, but it is a reality that humans ignore. From the point of view of Buddhism, death is the end of the present life, but it is also the beginning of a new life, if one hasn't attained *Nibbāna* (the experience of the deathless state).

Facing Death with Dignity

Birth, decay and death are natural processes and universally unavoidable for all living beings. Yet all living beings are afraid to face death and they presume it to be "evil," since they do not truly understand its nature, except

those who have attained enlightenment. Nevertheless those who have prepared for sacred death or spiritual death will not be afraid of death either. Unlike Buddhism, most religions attempt to describe the process of dying and death as a self-transformation. In this regard, there is nothing much said about the spiritual death whether this kind of death is related to self-transformation or not.

Spiritual death should be understood as a process. In reality, facing death is not very strange for those who have learned how to develop the spiritual path. Yet some interpret death as transformation of self.

Spiritual death is a process whereby one experiences salvation (Western), or self-awakening (Eastern), and by which the fear of death is de-repressed. Because the old self (consciousness in Buddhism) dies and a new self emerges, spiritual death transforms one's attitudes both toward life and in the face of death. The point is that spiritual death triggers a awakening of rebirth.¹⁷⁰

Nevertheless there is no universal agreement about the meaning of spiritual death from the religious perspective, since different religions interpret the meaning of nature of death based on their own religious criteria. And each religion offers its own perspective about the significance of life and death.

In terms of the view of death, the concept of *bardo* in Tibetan Buddhism teaches how death takes place. *Bardo* is a combination of two words, "*bar+do*." *Bar* means "in between," and *do* means "island or mark." The concept of *bardo* is that it is the experience that stands between death and birth. It is described in the following manner:

The past situation has just occurred and the future situation has not yet manifested itself so there is a gap between the two. This is basically the *bardo* experience. . . . The visions that develop in the *bardo* state, and the brilliant colors and sounds that come along with the visions, are not made out of any kind of substance which needs maintenance from the point of view of the perceiver, but they just happen, as expression of silence and expression of emptiness.¹⁷¹

Based on this statement, it is understood that the *bardo* is something like a dream state; it contains visions and images and presents the dying person with a vision of awakening or rebirth.

Unlike the Tibetan view, Hindus interpret the nature of death in a different way. Death is not real, but it is an illusion. Death is a kind of natural process. Although the body dies, the true Self (*Atman*) does not die, because it is real and eternal and nothing within it can perish under any circumstances. For them:

The secret of death is to realize the Supreme Self, hidden in the heart, not by preaching, not by sacrifice, but through meditation and grace. It can be attained, finally, only by those whom the Self chooses. "One who knows the Self," Yama said, "puts death to death." This realization, called *moksha* (liberation), emancipates one from the vagaries of life's *karma* (action) and from *saṁsāra* (the endless round of birth, death, and rebirth). . . . Those who die unaware of the Self are either reborn, or return to a lower evolutionary state as determined by their *karmic* life-actions. Those who die aware of the Self are at last released from the cycle of birth and death-eternal peace is theirs. Thus realized, they become immortal.¹⁷²

It is clear in the beliefs of Hindus that those who die with awareness of the true Self can gain release from the cycle of birth and death. Their final goal is to attain *moksha*. It means liberation from birth and death and the final union

with the Brahma, that is, the Supreme Self of Brahma. In reality, the final union with Brahma takes place before death.

Moreover, from the point of view of Christians, death is a consequence of sin and temporary release from eternal life. One must die to enter into the beginning of eternal life. Yet eventually the dead will be raised. There is no doubt that the concept of resurrection (the rising of Jesus Christ from death) is related to the mystery of death. It is generally believed that a final judgment day will take place one day.¹⁷³ Hence Christians will wait for a final judgment day. The fundamental concept of death in Christianity is that death is a consequence of sin; death is a temporary separation of body and soul, and the death of sin is birth into eternal life. The dead will be raised and judged at the second coming of Christ. Therefore, the dead await a final judgment day. There are two kinds of judgments.

First, the *particular* judgment of each individual person to decide whether his or her soul is to be sent immediately to heaven, hell or purgatory, and, second, a *final* judgment on the last day when the bodies of the dead arise from their sleep in the earth to become re-ensouled.¹⁷⁴

Christian faith about the death and the rebirth experience is somehow a kind of awakening for their understanding of spiritual death. Christians are waiting for the opportunity to enter into the resurrection of eternal life both of soul and body in the incorruption of the Holy Spirit. For them death is nothing but a union with God.

Like Christianity, Muslims believe that the dead will rise from their graves at the Day of Judgment. They will be judged according to their good and bad deeds. It is believed that there is a set of heavenly books where good and bad entries have been recorded. According to Islamic teachings, Muslims clean the dead body, perfume it, and family members wrap it in white cotton. The body is placed into a coffin and buried in a graveyard. "Prayers remind the mourners that the deceased is created from dust and to dust returns, that through death we return to await our fate, and that we will be raised at the Last Judgment."¹⁷⁵ Muslims assume that death is a kind of transition from this life to the eternity of the soul. The significance of life is to make preparation for eternal life. The dead person will not return to earth, but the soul will wait for the day of resurrection and judgment.¹⁷⁶

Since this study has explored the belief system of religions and the concept of life and death, it is impossible to ignore the concept of the Greek philosophers who attempted to interpret death from philosophical points of view. Regarding the issue of death, one Greek philosopher, Socrates, shared his views of the nature of death with his disciples. He attempted to understand what the nature of death would be and how one would be in the next life after death. For him, death was nothing more than a process of change, a relocation of the soul from here to another place. He also showed no fear about death to his

students, before he drank the hemlock. He confidently made the following statement about the process of death.

Let us reflect in this way, too, that there is good hope that death is a blessing, for it is one of two things: either the death is nothing and has no perception of anything, or it is, as we are told, a change and a relocating for the soul from here to another place. If it is complete lack of perception, like a dreamless sleep, then death would be a great advantage.¹⁷⁷

This philosophical statement of Socrates is very impressive. He seems to precisely know about the nature of death from the philosophical viewpoint. He clearly points out that death is a kind of blessing; there is nothing to fear, but it will be wonderful to experience; death is like "a dreamless sleep."

Buddhists posit that a dying person may see a sign of destiny that is related to upcoming future existence in the next life, just before the death consciousness takes place. In the context of the nature of death, medical doctors in the past had few opportunities to investigate such things as the sign of destiny. Now there is the possibility of investigating the statements of dying persons in order to see if such statements support the concept of the sign of destiny, the sign of *kamma* and so on. In the past it was believed that the sign of destiny was just a religious belief. Moreover, many people feel that to talk about death is evil and psychologically damaging; it is considered negative to mention such things in human society. However, Buddhist monks are advised to reflect on the nature of death by the Buddha in order to overcome the fear of death by

means of realizing the true nature of death. This kind of practice is also known as meditation of death (*marapānussati*). Fortunately, in this decade, one medical doctor named Raymond A. Moody, Jr., M.D. set up an experiment to explore the life journey with dying patients so as to study the view of seeing a sign of destiny before the patient's death. He wrote two books to share his experiments with dying patients.

In his books: *Life after Life* and *Reflections on Life after Life*, Dr. Moody elaborates on the experiences of death that may be related to a sign of destiny. These manifestations were described or related to him by dying patients. He interviewed many patients for the purpose of finding out about the near-death experience. He assumed that there is life after death. In many cases, he has recorded the unusual auditory sensations, pleasant and unpleasant visions, or frightened voices reported by dying patients. The following statements reflect what he was told by dying patients.

A man who was revived after having been pronounced dead on arrival at the hospital recounts that during his death experience, "I would hear what seemed to be bells tingling, a long way off, as if drifting through the wind. They sounded like Japanese wind-bells. . . . That was the only sound I could hear at times."

A young woman who nearly died from internal bleeding associated with a blood clotting disorder says that at the moment she collapsed, "I began to hear music of some sort, a majestic, really beautiful sort of music."¹⁷⁸

Some dying persons are likely to be aware of their own body. Moody named it the "spiritual body," in the dying state. When they notice for

themselves that they are out of their own body, they attempt to tell their experience to others. However, no one seems to hear them. The follow passages are the statement of the dying patients.

The most striking point of the whole experience was the moment when my being was suspended above the front part of my head. It was almost like it was trying to decide whether it wanted to leave or to stay. It seemed then as though time were standing still. . . . My being had no physical characteristics, but I have to describe it with physical terms. I could describe it in so many ways, in so many words, but none of them would be exactly right. It's so hard to describe. . . . I didn't see anything else during this experience. There was just blackness, except for the images I saw. Yet, I definitely felt the presence of a very powerful, completely loving being there with me all through this experience. . . . He was there, but he didn't have a physical body. It was kind of like a clear body, and I could sense every part of it -- arms, legs, and so on -- but I wasn't seeing it physically.¹⁷⁹

Moody had more interviews with many people who have had near-death experiences after he published the book, *Life After Life* and he stated that among the people, some of them were actually pronounced clinically dead, but others were just close to death. He admitted to his feelings about death in interviews with patients.

I stated in *Life After Life* that I had not found any cases in which a "heaven" -- at least in a certain traditional portrayal of the place -- was described. However, I have now talked with numerous individuals who tell with remarkable consistency of catching glimpses of other realms of being which might well be termed "heavenly." It is interesting to me that in several of these accounts a single phrase -- "a city of light" -- occurs.¹⁸⁰

There are so many reliable sources in *Life after Life*. It is able to provide convincing evidence for those who have doubt about death. However, there is

no dilemma about life and death or life after life in Buddhism. For this reason, this research does not devote any additional attention to further study about the subject of life after life. Now this study will proceed to the issue of the "existence" after death for those who have attained enlightenment. In this world, people mostly believe that there is an existence after this life. Yet they have doubt about the existence of *Nibbāna* that has been described as extinction and nothing remaining after death. One of the objectives of this study is to explore how Buddhists understand the nature of *Nibbāna*, what is the significance of *Nibbāna*, what is the spiritual transition between death and the deathless state and how life transforms into the state of *Nibbāna*. This inquiry into *Nibbāna* is to know whether *Nibbāna* exists just in mind, or is just in thought, or is the true statement of reality. The following chapter will contain the full content of Pāli and Burmese literature sources inquiring into what the existence of *Nibbāna* means to Theravāda Buddhism. Yet one can pose the questions, "What is *Nibbāna*?" and "Where does *Nibbāna* exist?"

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF THE EXISTENCE OF NIBBĀNA

Does *Nibbāna* Exist?

In Chapter 2, interpretations of *Nibbāna* and its concepts represented by various scholars were discussed. However, this study requires further discussion of the analysis of its existence. The existence of *Nibbāna* is a critical issue from the Buddhist perspective and it is difficult to determine whether it truly exists or not. If it truly exists, then it is difficult to understand how it exists. Although the existence of *Nibbāna* is described in a definite way in the Buddhist scriptures and in Buddhist thought, there is still some uncertainty as to whether it exists in the mind or somewhere else. Yet Buddhists persist in claiming that it exists. However, they cannot provide proof of its existence with empirical evidence to non-believers of Buddhism. Instead they merely cite meditative achievement. Their opinion is that no one, except Buddhas and Buddhist Saints (enlightened beings), know for sure what *Nibbāna* is and how it exists. Many people wonder whether the existence of *Nibbāna* can be known through the contact of physical phenomena or mental phenomena, or whether its existence is subject to mental and physical conditions or non-conditions.

In the canonical context, Buddhist concepts are somehow different from the concepts of other religions. Buddhism has never mentioned mighty beings or

God as a means for the attainment of *Nibbāna*. Buddhists emphasize that no one can realize the state of *Nibbāna* without differentiating between theory and practice. One of the aims of this study is to remove the concept of duality, that is, the concept of existence and non-existence. In this case, it is necessary to know first what the concept of existence and non-existence is. In Chapter 3, the concept of "existence" has been discussed as a place where beings are born and die continually. And also there is general agreement among Buddhist scholars that the modes of existence involve not only the process of cause and effect, but also conditional circumstances depending on one another as a causal relationship. From the point of view of Buddhism, it is understood that to acknowledge something as being in existence, there must be causes, conditions, production and dependence on something in a causal relationship. A being is considered to be subject to an existence with a process that contains arising and decaying; rebirth and death and so on. This criterion is applied to all living beings with conventional truth (*sammuti-saccā*), but it does not apply to absolute ultimate reality (*paramattha-saccā*).

The absolute ultimate reality in Buddhism refers to the state of *Nibbāna*. With regard to the aforementioned state of conditions or existences, *Nibbāna* is an exception, because *Nibbāna* has nothing to do with a conditional state, but is, in fact, an unconditional state. This means that it is beyond the conditional circumstances. *Nibbāna* is often described as the state of the "unconditioned."

As a matter of fact, it is supposed that those who enter *Nibbāna* after death reach the state of "non-existence." However, some Buddhists reject the concept of *Nibbāna* as the state of "non-existence" saying that the state of *Nibbāna* still exists. But it has nothing to do with the conditioned thirty-one planes of existence where beings are born (*jāti*) and die (*maraṇa*). For enlightened beings, *Nibbāna* truly exists, even if it doesn't deal with all three sub-moments: arising (*uppāda*), presence (*thiti*), and dissolution (*bhanga*). Yet *Nibbāna* is regarded to be existent, inspite of involving a process of no cause and no effect.

Regarding this issue, the Buddhist Pāli scholar, Shwe Kyin Sayādaw who was the founder of Shwe Khin sect in Burma, described the existence of *Nibbāna* as "The Existence of *Dhamma-Visesa* " (the transcendental state of the *Dhamma*). For him, *Nibbāna* is an absolute reality that truly exists.¹⁸¹ Ven. Taungpulu-Kabā-Aye Sayādaw, who was a well-known meditation teacher for *dhutaṅga* (ascetic or austere practices) in Burma and a founder of the forest living tradition, also proclaims that *Nibbāna* exists for enlightened beings who have realized the unconditioned ultimate reality (*paramattha-dhamma*). *Dhutanga* literally means "shaking of the defilements", that is, the means of purification. *Dhutanga* consists of thirteen types of practice, often translated as ascetic or austere practices. These Sayādaws felt that without practicing mindfulness meditation, it is impossible for worldlings (*puthujjana*) to realize the ultimate reality and that they could not reach the level of the transcendental

state either. The complete realization is considered as seeing things as essential oneness (*eko dhammo*).¹⁸²

Ledi Sayādaw was also a scholar and great spiritual teacher, who was well known for his books, *Ledi Dīpanī*, and for his successful practice of meditation. He stated that after listening to the teaching of the Buddha, people begin to know that there is a kind of "transcendental element" (*Dhamma-dhātu*) which truly exists in the state of *Nibbāna*, but it is difficult to reach that state. Only those who practice meditation and who have already fulfilled perfections (*pāramīs*) for many years can reach it. Ledi Sayādaw emphasized that the nature of *Nibbāna* is very profound (*ati-gambhīra*), and very hard to see (*ati-duddasa*). It is difficult for those who do not see the nature of impermanence (*anicca*), the true suffering of the five aggregates (*dukkha*), and the insubstantiality of phenomena (*anatta*) which occur from moment to moment, to attain the absolute peace of *Nibbāna*.¹⁸³

Since the experience of *Nibbāna* is prominent in the Buddha as well as *Arahants* (enlightened beings), Buddhists recognize *Nibbāna* as their final goal for liberation, and that it is beyond human intellect. However, it doesn't mean that no one can obtain it. In reality, without spiritual achievement, that is, enlightenment, it is impossible to realize that state of peace. It is also impossible to realize that state solely with the intellect. Yet *Nibbāna* is philosophically described as emptiness, nothingness, cessation and so on. In this context, the

concept of nothingness is the essential doctrine for Mahāyāna Buddhism, while the concept of cessation or extinction is the essential doctrine of Theravāda Buddhism. Nevertheless, Mahāyāna Buddhism affirms the concept of nothingness with a true essence and states the nature of nothingness as obtaining the state of true awakening. The Awakening from the Dream of *Māyā* is called the "unveiling of Reality."¹⁸⁴ According to the Tibetan Book of the Great Liberation, translated by Evans-Wentz, the concept of the true essence is described as follows:

As set forth in *Avatamsaka Sutra*, attributed to Nāgarjuna, the essentiality or the true essence, behind all *saṃsāric* things or beings is likened to a dust-free mirror, which is the basis of all phenomena, the basis itself being permanent, or non-transitory, and real, the phenomena being evanescent and unreal. And, just as the mirror reflects images, so the True Essence embraces all phenomena; and all things and beings exist in and by it. It is this True Essence which comes to fruition in the Buddhas; and is everywhere present through the manifested cosmos, which is born of it, and eternally present, unmanifested, throughout limitless space. There is no place throughout the Universe where the Essentiality of a Buddha is not present. Far and wide throughout the spaces of space the Buddha Essence is present and perpetually manifested.¹⁸⁵

In order to analyze *Nibbāna* as to its true nature, Mahāyāna Buddhism holds its view of the true essence, which incorporates the existence of the Buddhas who have previously entered the absolute state of *Nibbāna*. As has been mentioned before, the true essence of the Buddhas manifests in three aspects symbolized as the Three Bodies (*Tri-kāya*, in Sanskrit). They are: (1) *Dharma-kāya* (the immutable Buddha Essence or True Body, that is, Formless, Eternally Self-Existing, the Essentiality of Bodhi), (2) *Sambhoga-kāya* (the

enjoyment Body or Reflected *Bodhi* which exists in the Heaven-world or in a Buddha-field), and (3) *Nirmāṇa-kāya* (the Manifestation Body or Body of Incarnation which exists in human world as the historical Buddha, known as Sakyamuni Buddha). Based on the concept of *Tri-kāyas*, there is no doubt for Mahāyāna Buddhists, more precisely Pure Land Buddhists, who say that the immutable Buddha Essence exists in the Buddha-field forever. The essence of Buddhas exists in the Buddha-realm. The Buddha can be seen only by those followers, which have faith that is strong and genuine in the essence of Buddhas.

Unlike Mahāyāna Buddhists, Theravāda Buddhists do not emphasize that the Essence of Buddhas exists in a Buddha-realm. They believe that since the Buddha has entered into the state of *Nibbāna*, no mental and physical manifestations remain; however, the transcendental nature does still remain. The transcendental state contains no appearance or form. In the transcendental state, there is no substantial or empirical element that remains of the Buddhas or *Arahants* after their death; there is something that is very subtle in nature with peaceful tranquility and bliss that contains no empirical feeling. This means that the essence of enlightened beings including Buddhas and *Arahants* contains no physical and mental entity, but the mere essence of the *Dhamma* (*Dhamma-vīśesa*) or the element of *Dhamma* (*Dhamma-dhātu*). Thus the *Nibbāna dhātu* (element of *Nibbāna*) is understood to have no empirical phenomenon or substance residing in the state of *Nibbāna*. Furthermore, the state of *Nibbāna* is

out of the thirty-one planes of existence. As a matter of fact, what the state of absolute *Nibbāna* is likened to is an enlightened being who has entered the state of *Nirodhasamāpatti* (the attainment of cessation) in the *Arūpavacara* plane (the formless existence).¹⁸⁶

Nirodhasamāpatti is a state of spiritual achievement that is the non-occurrence of consciousness and its concomitants owing to their progressive cessation. In that state of *Nirodhasamāpatti*, there is no perception, no feeling and the non-occurrence of the process of physical and mental phenomena. One can enter the state of *Nirodhasamāpatti* for a maximum of seven days.

According to the *Visuddhimagga* (The Path of Purification), not everyone can get into the state of *Nirodhasamāpatti* due to lack of the spiritual ability. Only those enlightened beings capable of entering the eight stages of *Jhāna*, known as *aṭṭha-samāpatti* can enter *Nirodhasamāpatti*. *Samāpatti* here means the attainment of *Jhāna*, that is, the name for the eight absorptions, the four stages of the "Fine-material" (*rūpa-jhāna*) and the four stages of the "Immaterial sphere" (*arūpa-jhāna*).¹⁸⁷ Regarding this fact, the *Visuddhimagga* provides the following statement:

No ordinary men, no Stream-enterers or Once-returners, and no Non-returners and *Arahants* who are bare-insight workers attain it. But both Non-returners (*Anāgāmi*) and those with cankers destroyed (*Arahants*) who are obtainers of the eight attainments attain it. For it is said: "Understanding that is master, owing to possession of two powers, to the tranquilization of three formations, to sixteen kinds of exercise of knowledge, and to nine kinds of exercise of concentration, is knowledge

of the attainment of cessation" (Ps.i, 97). And these qualifications are not to be found together in any persons other than Non-returners and those whose cankers are destroyed, who are obtainers of the eight attainments. That is why only they and no others attain it.¹⁸⁸

In terms of the above statement, Buddhaghosa clearly points out that there are only two kinds of individuals that reach this attainment. Those individuals are *Anāgāmis* (noble beings who have attained the third stage of path and fruition knowledge) and *Arahants* (enlightened beings who have attained the highest stage of path and fruition knowledge). They are able to enter the state of *Nirodhasamāpatti* (the attainment of the cessation of perception and feeling) through their spiritual ability of mastering the eight levels of *jhāna*. In this regard, one who enters the state of *Nirodhasamāpatti* is not much different from one who is dead. What is the difference between one who has attained the goal and one who is dead? There is a statement recorded in the *Visuddhimagga* as follows:

When a bhikkhu (one) is dead, friend, has completed his term, his bodily formations have ceased and are quite still, his verbal formations have ceased and are quite still, his mental formations have ceased and are quite still, his life is exhausted, his heat has subsided, and his faculties are broken up. When a bhikkhu (one) has entered upon the cessation of perception and feeling, his bodily formations have ceased and are quite still, his verbal formations have ceased and are quite still, his mental formations have ceased and are quite still, his life is unexhausted, his heat has not subsided, his faculties are quite whole.¹⁸⁹

Buddhists assume that since the nature of *Nibbāna* is similar to the state of *Nirodhasamāpatti*, the absolute state of *Nibbāna* is so subtle and so profound

that it leads non-Buddhists to become more confused philosophically. This becomes a critical issue from the analytical perspective.

What Is *Nibbāna*?

Although there are some distinctions between Theravāda and Mahāyāna Buddhism with regard to the concept of *Nibbāna*, both traditions still accept that *Nibbāna* truly exists. To confirm the view of the traditions, there is a need to analyze what *Nibbāna* is. First of all, this study needs to respond to a question that was posed: What is *Nibbāna*? Indeed, to respond to such a simple question, one would have to write volumes of books in reply. Since the concept of *Nibbāna* is philosophically critical and theoretically argumentative, no one can write a reasonable answer to that simple question. Possibly, the more one explains, the more people will be confused. Walpola Rahula shares this view of that issue. "The only reasonable reply to give to the question is that it can never be answered completely and satisfactorily in words, because human language is too poor to express the real nature of the Absolute Truth or Ultimate Reality which is *Nibbāna*."¹⁹⁰ Therefore, before analyzing what *Nibbāna* is, one should know what the character (*lakkhana*) of *Nibbāna* is, and what its functions (*rasa*) and its manifestation (*paccupaṭṭhāna*) are in order to understand more clearly the state of *Nibbāna*.

In the Buddhist text named *Sammohavinodanī-aṭṭhakathā* (*Vibhanga-aṭṭhakathā*), the character of *Nibbāna* has been described: *santi lakkhaṇaṃ Nibbānaṃ* (absolute peace is the character of *Nibbāna*).¹⁹¹ *Santi* (peace) here means ultimate tranquility which is free from ten kinds of defilements (*kilesa*),¹⁹² and free from the eleven types of fires (*aggi*).¹⁹³ That is to say, that worldlings (*puthujjana*) have desires and rejoice in the inner and outer sense-bases and cleave to them. Consequently, the stream of defilements carries away all these ordinary beings; they are utterly enslaved by birth, death, pain and despair. On the contrary, the noble disciples (*ariyas*) do not rejoice in the inner and outer sense-bases and do not cleave to them or are not attached to them. Thus they are counted as beings free from desire, illusion and craving for worldly pleasure and are at peace. Regarding cessation of desire, Ven. Nāgasena addressed the subject in the following way:

For him (them), not rejoicing in them (the inner and outer sense bases), not approving of them or cleaving to them, craving ceases; from the cessation of craving is the cessation of clinging; from the cessation of clinging is the cessation of becoming; from the cessation of becoming is the cessation of birth; from the cessation of birth, old age and death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair cease. Thus is the cessation of this whole mass of suffering. In this way, sire, cessation is *Nibbāna*.¹⁹⁴

Referring to the above statement, it is understood that cessation doesn't mean absolute cessation for everything, but cessation of defilements that cause one to be in the round of rebirth and death. It is said that there is no longer rebirth so there is no death. Thus *Nibbāna* is described as "*santi-lakkhaṇā*" (the

ultimate peace). In this regard, it is theoretically clear that the original message of *Nibbāna* has nothing to do with the concept of nothingness or absolute cessation. It is absolute peace and ultimate truth brought about by the ceasing of all the fires of the defilements and the ceasing of all kinds of suffering. For this reason, the meaning of *Nibbāna* is not annihilation.

The function of *Nibbāna* is described in *Vibhanga-aṭṭhakathā* as *accutirasam* (the state of deathlessness or everlasting peace). This means that since the enlightened beings have entered the state of absolute peace, they will definitely no longer return to the existence of *saṃsāra* (round of rebirth). And it is understood that proclaiming the state of absolute peace has nothing to do with the natural process of the three sub-moments: arising (*uppāda*), presence (*thiti*) and dissolution (*bhanga*). In the state of *Nibbāna*, the nature of absolute peace involves no dissolution. Therefore, it is necessary to differentiate between absolute peace (*Nibbāna*) and eternalism (Supreme Soul) in this context. The concept of eternalism is directly related to the concept of soul theory. According to that theory the soul is eternal and everlasting and that soul is linked in union with God or Brahma. As a matter of fact, soul theory deals with a universal God or Brahma; however, Buddhists affirm that *Nibbāna* has nothing to do with such a concept of the eternal soul or an eternal God or Brahma.

The manifestation of *Nibbāna* is *animitta-paccupaṭṭhāna* (signlessness by way of manifestation). This means that it consists of no signs, no size, no shape,

no formation and no dissolution in the realization of enlightened beings. The nature of *Nibbāna* has arisen from the nature of *saṅkhāra* (mental formations) and *saṅkhata* (conditional existence); however, there is no sign, no size, and no shape in the state of absolute *Nibbāna*.¹⁹⁵ Moreover, there is no similar thing that can be compared to the nature of *Nibbāna*. "It is not possible by simile or argument or cause or method to point out the shape or configuration or age or size of *Nibbāna*."¹⁹⁶ In terms of this *Nibbāna*, the Buddha precisely addressed a statement to help the followers know what it is. The statement is as follows.

*Viññāṇaṃ anidassanaṃ, anantaṃ sabbatopabhaṃ.
Ettha āpo ca pathavī, tejo vāyo na gādhati.
Ettha dīghañca rassañca, aṇuṃ thūlaṃ subhāsubhaṃ.
Ettha nāmañca rūpañca, asesam uparujjhati.
Vaññāṇassa nirodhena, etthe tam uparujjhati.*¹⁹⁷

Where consciousness is signless, boundless, all-luminous.
That's where earth, water, fire and air find no footing,
There both long and short, small and great, fair and foul,
There "name-and-form" are wholly destroyed.
With the cessation of consciousness this is all destroyed.¹⁹⁸

In fact, since the nature of *Nibbāna* is so profound and abyssal, it is impossible for worldlings to see it or realize it. This is so, because one hasn't attained the path and fruition knowledge through meditation. It is not because *Nibbāna* doesn't really exist. Let us look at an example; for instance, a blind man finds it impossible to see the sun and the moon. In this regard, we cannot say that the blind man cannot see them, because the sun and the moon do not truly exist. Indeed, they truly exist, but the man unfortunately lacks the power of

vision to see them. Similarly, worldlings (*puthujjanas*) do not see the ultimate truth of *Nibbāna* due to the lack of supramundane wisdom. For this reason, the Buddhist text, named *Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha*, precisely states: *Nibbānaṃ pana lokuttarasakhatam stumaggaññāṇena sacchikātabbam* (*Nibbāna* is termed supramundane, and is to be realized by the knowledge of the four paths).¹⁹⁹

Where Does *Nibbāna* Exist?

According to Theravāda Buddhism, the transcendental state of *Nibbāna* can be everywhere. However, it is excluded from the thirty-one planes of existence. It is said that it exists in any direction for enlightened individuals after their death.²⁰⁰ This is a critical point about the state of *Nibbāna*, because it doesn't exist as a pre-existent quality in each individual enlightened being, but *Nibbāna* comes to exist only after enlightened beings enter the state of *Nibbāna* after death. And the state of *Nibbāna* is different from the state of the thirty-one planes of existences that already exist before one comes to exist. In reality, *Nibbāna* has not existed beforehand. This means that *Nibbāna* hasn't occurred before enlightened beings attain enlightenment. *Nibbāna* doesn't exist as an empirical state, but as a transcendental state.²⁰¹ Therefore, according to the Theravāda Buddhist view, it is difficult to point out the specific place of *Nibbāna* as here or there. It is only possible to say that *Nibbāna* can be everywhere for the enlightened beings after their death.

Regarding this kind of issue, once King Milinda asked Nāgasena, "Is there a spot to the east or the south or the west or the north, above or below or across, where *Nibbāna* is stored up?" Nāgasena answered the king, "There is no spot, sir, to the east or the south or the west or the north, above or below or across, where *Nibbāna* is stored up."²⁰² Then the King Milinda argued that if there is no place for the storing up of *Nibbāna*, then there is no *Nibbāna* and that it is a false realization for those who have experienced *Nibbāna*. Furthermore, King Milinda argued that if there are on the earth fields producing crops, trees producing fruits, and mines producing gems then, there must be a place for producing things. Similarly, if there is *Nibbāna*, there must be a place for producing *Nibbāna*, but there is no place for producing *Nibbāna*, and so there is no *Nibbāna*, which is realized.²⁰³ To King Milinda's argument, Venerable Nāgasena responded as follows:

There is no place for storing up of *Nibbāna*, sire; but there is this *Nibbāna*, and one practicing rightly realizes *Nibbāna* by means of proper attention. It is, sire, as there is fire, though there is no place for storing it up, and a man rubbing two sticks together obtains fire. Even so, sire, there is *Nibbāna*, though there is no place for storing it up, and one practicing rightly realizes *Nibbāna* by means of proper attention.²⁰⁴

It is said, according to Theravāda Buddhist perspective, that *Nibbāna* has nothing to do with the concept of time and space. This is because time does not exist in the ultimate truth, but is a mere concept. *Nibbāna* is regarded as essentially of beginningless and endless duration. However, in the conditioned

world there is time, that is, past, present, and future in daily life. For this issue, Theravādins may argue that these are only spoken of by means of conventional usage or conventional truth in order to communicate, but *Nibbāna* has nothing to do with time; it is always regarded as the present. As mentioned previously, it is claimed of *Nibbāna* that it consists of no space or no locality. In this regard, what Buddhists believe is that the concept of time and space can be indicated by mind, since mind counts time as duration and space as locality. These are merely relative to mind. According to *Dhammasaṅgaṇī-aṭṭhakathā* (*Aṭṭhāsālinī-aṭṭhakathā*), the concept of time implies a close connection between time and consciousness. Yet the concept of time and consciousness are described as a mutual relationship. The following statement has been recorded in *Dhammasaṅgaṇī-aṭṭhakathā*.

*Samaye Niddisi cittaṃ, cittaṇa samayaṃ muni.
Niyametvāna dīpetuṃ, dhamme tattha pabhedato.*²⁰⁵

By time the Sage described the mind,
And by the mind described the time.
In order to show, by such definition,
The phenomena there arranged in classes.²⁰⁶

Since there is no mind in the state of *Nibbāna*, there is nothing much to say of time. And if there is no mind and no body after death of enlightened beings, then nothing is necessary to count time and space. In the *Gambhīrāgambhīra Mahānibbūta-Dīpanī*, *Nibbāna* is said to involve no past and no future, but always exists in the present.

The significance of *Nibbāna* has been mentioned in *Parivā Pāḷi*, Vi-P Vol. V.: *Nibbānaṃ arahato gati* (*Nibbāna* is the place where enlightened beings have gone after their death).²⁰⁷ The word *gati* literally means "going," "course of existence" or "secure place." However, here it means the transcendental place of enlightened beings after their death.

To clarify the above Pāḷi statement, its commentary (*Parivā-aṭṭhakathā*) states: *Sucirampi thatvā pana nibbānaṃ arahato gati khīṇāsavassa arahato anupādisesa-nibbānadhātu ekaṃsena gatīti attho* (because *Nibbāna* eternally exists as the transcendental state, it is confirmed as a transcendental place or deathless place for former enlightened beings, and it is also considered to be the transcendental element with the full extinction of existence [*anupādisesa-nibbāna-dhātu*]).²⁰⁸ The transcendental place here means the place where danger and death no longer exist and a place that is not subject to the conditioned circumstances (*saṅkhata*) for all beings.

According to the perspective of Shwe Kyin Sayādaw, since those former enlightened beings exist in the state of *Nibbāna*, the element of *Nibbāna* (*Nibbāna-dhātu*) goes beyond the categories of humans (*manussa*), celestial beings (*deva*), and heavenly beings (*Brahma*). This is because they are no longer under the category of conventional humans, celestial beings, and heavenly beings. And they are also no longer counted as beings, since they are no more counted under the categories of signs or forms of empirical beings. Yet the

existence of *Nibbāna* is not considered to be emptiness (*tuccha*) and nothingness (*abhāva*), although their physical and mental phenomena absolutely cease.²⁰⁹ In this context, Theravāda Buddhism doesn't mention the view of the "Buddha Field" where the Buddhas or enlightened beings always live.

However, King Minlinda was keen to know where was the Buddha, after his *Mahā-pari-nibbāna* (Great-*Nibbāna*). Therefore, he asked Nāgasena, "Is there the Buddha?" "Yes, sire, there is the Buddha." Nāgasena replied. "If you say so, is it possible to point to the Buddha and say that he is either here or there?"²¹⁰

To his question, Nāgasena responded as follows:

Sire, the Blessed One (the Buddha) has attained final *Nibbāna* in the element of *Nibbāna* that has no substrate remaining for future birth. It is not possible to point to the Blessed One and say that he is either here or there. What do you think about this, sire? When the flame of a great mass of fire has gone out, is it possible to point to that flame and say that it is either here or there?" (Indeed) it is not possible to point to the Blessed One who has come to end and say that he is either here or there. But, sire, it is possible to point to the Blessed One by means of the Body of the *Dhamma*,²¹¹ for *Dhamma*, sire, was taught by the Blessed One.²¹²

The issue of the Buddha who entered *Mahāparinibbāna* (the Great *Nibbāna*) is critical for Buddhism. Where is the Buddha after his death? It is practically said that he is nowhere as a being or an individual, but it is philosophically said that he is somewhere as an absolute peace. However, Theravādins do not hold that the Buddhas reside in the Buddha realm after their final *Nibbāna*, representing the Essence of Buddha or True body (*Dharma-kāya*), but they emphasize it in a different way. This means the mere essence of the

dhamma. Moreover, *Nibbāna* has been described as *dhamma-dhātu* (the element of *dhamma*) that can exist everywhere or in every direction. But Theravādins refuse to say that the true Body of the Buddhas (*Dhamma-kāya*) exists in the 31 planes of existences.²¹³

How Many Kinds of *Nibbāna* Are There?

In Buddhist texts, such as *Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha* and *Nibbāna-dīpanī*, *Nibbāna* has been described in different categories. Studying the different types of *Nibbāna* enables one to understand the concept of *Nibbāna* better: what *Nibbāna* is, what the nature of *Nibbāna* involves, and how blissful it will be, and so on. In my opinion, speculation on the concept of *Nibbāna* is a kind of philosophical issue, and categorization of *Nibbāna* is a kind of textual view. In the *Nibbāna-dhātu Sutta*, *Itivuttaka Pāḷi*, *Nibbāna-dhātu* (*Nibbāna-element*) is divided into two aspects. One is a type of *Nibbāna* with the residue remaining and the other is a type of *Nibbāna* without the residue remaining. The former type is named as "*sa-upādisesa-nibbāna-dhātu*" (The full extinction of defilements) and the latter one is named as "*an-upādisesa-nibbāna-dhātu*" (The full extinction of existences). The canonical statement reads as follows:

Bhikkhus, there are these two *Nibbāna*-elements (*Nibbāna-dhātu*). What are the two? The *Nibbāna-element* with residue left and the *Nibbāna-element* with no residue left.

What, bhikkhus, is the *Nibbāna-element* with residue left? Here a bhikkhu is an Arahant, one whose taints (*āsavas*) are destroyed, the holy

life fulfilled, who has done what had to be done, laid down the burden, attained the goal, destroyed the fetters of being and is completely released through final knowledge. However, his five sense faculties remain unimpaired, by which he still experiences what is agreeable and disagreeable and feels pleasure and pain. It is the extinction of attachment, hate and delusion in him that is called the *Nibbāna-element* with residue left (*sa-upādisesa-nibbāna-dhātu*).

Now what, bhikkhu, is the *Nibbāna-element* with no residue left? Here a bhikkhu is an Arahant . . . completely released through final knowledge. For him, here in this very life, all that is experienced, not being delighted in, will be extinguished. That, bhikkhus, is called the *Nibbāna-element* with residue left (*an-upādisesa-nibbāna-dhātu*).²¹⁴

With regard to this it is understood that since one has attained the highest path and fruition knowledge, that is, the attainment of full enlightenment, he or she is able to remove all defilements through the power of the enlightened wisdom. There are no defilements remaining in the individual any longer. This kind of *Nibbāna* is also named as "*Kilesa-Parinibbāna*." It is said that after entering the state of *Nibbāna* after death, the enlightened beings are no longer in the existence, but are in a state known as non-existence. As a matter of fact, enlightened beings are still in the existence of absolute peace, but they no longer have rebirth and death; no longer exist in *samsāra* (the cycle of life and death) and no longer possess the five aggregates (*khandhas*) as well. Thus it is named as "*Khandha-Parinibbāna*."²¹⁵

The two views offer us a clear picture of how the condition of enlightened beings will be, before the situation of their death and after the situation of their death. However, Ven. Anuruddha thought that these two views

didn't provide sufficient information about the state of *Nibbāna*. He approached another way to clarify what the state of *Nibbāna* will be. His way is nothing especially new; it is a collection of the manifestations of the state of *Nibbāna* that are described in Pāli texts. He describes the three faces of manifestation in the state of *Nibbāna*: They are: void, signless, and desireless. The following is his clear statement recorded in the *Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha*.

Nibbāna is called the void (*suññata*) because it is devoid of greed, hatred, and delusion, and because it is devoid of all that is conditioned. It is called signless (*animitta*) because it is free from the signs of greed, etc., and free from the signs of all conditioned things. It is called desireless (*appaṇihita*) because it is free from the hankering of greed, etc., and because it is not desired by craving.²¹⁶

Somehow, his view might be helpful for *Nibbāna* seekers to get wider knowledge and deeper understanding of the concept. Yet the information that he provided is unclear for some to recognize the stages of *Nibbāna* so that they are still confused by the differences between theoretical *Nibbāna* and practical *Nibbāna*. There are two aspects to be understood. The first one is *Nibbāna* as "Explanatory Principle" and the second one is *Nibbāna* as "Experiential Realization." Ledi Sayādaw brings out his view to analyze the stages of *Nibbāna*. He emphasizes that the state of *Nibbāna* is so profound (*gambhīra*) and its true nature so hard to see (*duddasa*) that the concept of *Nibbāna* may mislead one to the wrong path and to misinterpret its meaning by mixing it with other views. He divided *Nibbāna* into seven types with references to the Three Baskets

(*Ti-Piṭaka*) in his book, *Nibbāna Dīpanī*. They are: (1) *Micchādiṭṭhi-Nibbāna* (*Nibbāna* with wrong view), (2) *Sammuti-Nibbāna* (*Nibbāna* in present life), (3) *Tadaṅga-Nibbāna* (*Nibbāna* in the moment), (4) *Vikkhambhana-Nibbāna* (*Nibbāna* with suppression of defilement), (5) *Samuccheda-Nibbāna* (*Nibbāna* with extinction of defilement by destruction), (6) *Paṭipassaddhi-Nibbāna* (*Nibbāna* with extinction of defilement by tranquilization), and (7) *Nissaraṇa-Nibbāna* (*Nibbāna* with full extinction of defilements).²¹⁷

Of the seven, (1) *Micchādiṭṭhi-Nibbāna* is a combination of two words: *Micchādiṭṭhi* and *Nibbāna*. *Micchādiṭṭhi* here means wrong view. This means, according to the *Nibbāna Dīpanī*, that one misinterprets happiness that is related to five senses of sensual pleasure (*kāma-sukha*) as immediate *Nibbāna* in present life. In the *Brahmajāla Sutta*, *Dīgha-Nikāya*, the Buddha addresses this kind of view as a wrong view about the true *Nibbāna*. "Here a certain ascetic or Brahmin declares and holds the view; 'In as far as this self, being furnished and endowed with the fivefold sense-pleasures, indulges in them, then that is when the self realises the highest *Nibbāna* (*paramaḍiṭṭhadhamma-Nibbāna*) here and now.'"²¹⁸

In modern society, some people also believe that the pleasures of the senses are the highest happiness. This view is known as *Hedonism*. *Hedonism* is a western philosophical view that pleasure (including the absence of pain) is the sole intrinsic good in life. This view attracts people by its simplicity and its way

of confirming what most men already believe. Hedonists hold their view that pleasure and happiness is what everyone desires.²¹⁹ Taking this kind of worldly view, there is no doubt that some ascetics mistakenly interpret such kind of happiness as mundane *Nibbāna*. But, according to the Buddhist view, what they view is not relevant to the state of *Nibbāna*.

(2) The view of *Sammuti-Nibbāna* is that in the world, there are many dangers, such as, danger of fire, danger of storm, danger of war, danger of famine, danger of deadly diseases, and danger of enemies. On this one occasion, one is able to extinguish all kinds of dangers. Since one has escaped from the danger, it enables one to get into a peaceful and happy state in accordance with conventional statements. This kind of position in the present life is called *Sammuti-Nibbāna*. *Sammuti* here means present. This is because worldly people consider such situations of peace and tranquility as *Sammuti-Nibbāna* and these conditions are able to generate one's mental and physical happiness and peace. However, it is clear that this kind of condition cannot be compared to the true state of *Nibbāna*. The condition is temporally peaceful and happy for those who are released from dangers. But this is also not the true state of *Nibbāna*.²²⁰

(3) *Tadaṅga-Nibbāna* is understood as meaning that if one is able to remove defilements (*kilesas*) from moment to moment, or to temporarily abstain from unwholesome deeds (*akusala-kamma*), such as killing (*pāṇāti-pāta*), stealing (*adinādāna*), and wrong livelihood (*micchājīva*), then that one can

generate peace and happiness. This is named as *Tadaṅga-Nibbāna*. The reason is that when one undertakes some unwholesome actions and tortures others, one has to worry about his or her actions and has to suffer with anxiety and sorrow for his or her actions. Since one stops undertaking unwholesome actions, that is torturing others and disturbing people, the mind finds much peace and happiness. Since unwholesome deeds are no longer in one's mind at the moment, that kind of state is called *Tadaṅga-Nibbāna*. This is also recognized as a kind of *Nibbāna*, but it is not considered to be the true state of the final *Nibbāna*.²²¹

(4) *Vikkhambhana-Nibbāna* refers to the absorption or *Jhāna* states.

Vikkhambhana-Nibbāna here means suppression of defilements by serenity or stopping the influence of the hindrances for a certain period of time. Since one can overcome the five hindrances (*nīvaraṇas*) by repression, one is able to enter the state of absorption (*jhāna*). Hindrances involve five qualities, which are obstacles to the mind and disturb one's mental vision. From the practical point of view, in the presence of them one cannot reach Neighbourhood-Concentration (*upacāra-samādhi*) and Full Concentration (*appanā-samādhi*). As a result, one is unable to discern the truth. The five hindrances are: (1) sensuous desire (*kāmacchanda*), (2) ill will (*vyāpāda*), (3) sloth and torpor (*thīna-middha*), (4) restlessness and worry (*uddhacca-kukkucca*), and (5) sceptical doubt (*vicikicchā*). In the presence of these five unwholesome qualities, one is unable

to enter the state of *Jhāna*. Thus it is categorized as *Vikkhambhana-Nibbāna* in the theoretical sense.²²²

(5) To obtain clearer information about this kind of *Vikkhambhana-Nibbāna* that is related to *Diṭṭhadhamma-Nibbāna* one may study what is recorded in the *Diṭṭhadhamma-Nibbāna Sutta, Aṅguttara-Nikāya*. The following is the canonical statement.

Ven. Ānanda, it is said, "*Diṭṭhadhamma-Nibbāna*" (realization of *Nibbāna* in this very life), "*Diṭṭhadhamma-Nibbāna*." What is *Diṭṭhadhamma-Nibbāna* declared by the Buddha? Here, sire, the monks who are detached from sense-desires, detached from unwholesome states, they enter and remain in the first *Jhāna*, which is with initial application, sustained application, born of detachment, filled with delight and joy. Thus, sire, one particular *Diṭṭhadhamma-Nibbāna* has been declared by the Buddha.²²³

Based on the above statement, it is said that before entering *Nibbāna*, the meditator experiences peace and joyfulness of *jhāna* which is considered to be *Sandiṭṭhika-Nibbāna* or *Vikkhambhana-Nibbāna*. This is because one can realize the cessation of hindrances within a certain period; this experience is similar to the experience of *Nibbāna*. However, *Vikkhambhana-Nibbāna* here doesn't mean the absolute realization of the true *Nibbāna*. Yet it is categorized as *Vikkhambhana-Nibbāna* in the theoretical sense.

(6) *Samuccheda-Nibbāna* is understood to mean that one is able to uproot defilements through the power of path knowledge (*arahatta-magga*). The meditator can enter the level of *Samuccheda-Nibbāna*. *Samuccheda-Nibbāna*

here means "extinction of defilement by destruction." The destruction of defilement through the power of path knowledge is considered to be the function of *Samuccheda*, called *Samuccheda-kicca* in Pāli. To attain the level of peacefulness of complete destruction of defilement is called *Samuccheda-Nibbāna*. That name is synonymous with "*Sa-upādisesa-Nibbāna*" as well as "*Kilesa-Nibbāna*", that is, the full extinction of defilements.²²⁴

(6) *Paṭipassaddhi-Nibbāna* is directly referred to as *arahatta-phala-citta* (supramundane consciousness of fruition knowledge). *Paṭipassaddhi-Nibbāna* here means extinction of defilement by tranquilization. One can understand this kind of *Nibbāna* as the level of *Paṭipassaddhi-Nibbāna*, which means a present state of *Nibbāna* in this very life. In the *Maṅgala-Sutta* (*Blessing Sutta*), *Khuddaka-Nikāya*, the Buddha made a statement to emphasize this kind of *Nibbāna*: "*Nibbāna-sacchi-kiriya ca* -- the realization of *Nibbāna* in this very life." Since one can experience the peaceful and blissful state of *Nibbāna* in this very life, this level of *Nibbāna* is named as *Paṭipassaddhi-Nibbāna*.²²⁵

(7) Lastly, the final *Nibbāna* is described as *Nissanaṇa-Nibbāna*. It fulfills both requirements of *Nibbāna*, that is, the full extinction of defilements (*Sa-upādisesa-Nibbāna*) and the full extinction of existences (*An-upadisesa-Nibbāna*). This study provides a lot of information to help scholars understand this kind of *Nissanaṇa-Nibbāna* or the ultimate reality in the *Abhidhamma*. The purpose of all these categories of *Nibbāna* is to clarify what kinds of *Nibbāna*

Buddhists emphasize with respect to the goal and why they aim at *Nibbāna* as their final goal. There is a simple answer as to why they do this. It is because they want to be liberated from suffering that is linked to the existences of *samsāra* (round of rebirth and endless suffering). As a matter of fact, *Nissanāṇa-Nibbāna*, which means full liberation, is categorized as the absolute peace of the final *Nibbāna*.²²⁶

Regarding the categories of *Nibbāna*, there can be more than these aforementioned types of *Nibbāna*. There must be consideration of one of the Four Noble Truths, called *Nirodha-saccā*, which means absolute cessation of defilements or sufferings due to craving. Since it is said that *Nirodha-saccā* is *Nibbāna* and *Nibbāna* is also called *Nirodha-saccā*, *Nibbāna* can be described as the "cessation of craving". Thus *Nibbāna* can become many in a theoretical sense. For instance, the cessation of clinging to eye-base (*cakkhāyatana*) is considered to be one *Nibbāna*. Similarly, there are the cessation of clinging to ear-base, nose-base, tongue-base, body-base, and mind-base. Based on these six kinds of sense-bases, there could be altogether six types of *Nibbāna*.²²⁷

Similarly, there are six types of objects (*ārammaṇa*), such as visible objects (*rūpārammaṇa*), sound objects (*saddārammaṇa*) etc. There are six for consciousness (*viññāṇa*), six for contact (*samphassa*), six for contact feeling (*samphassa-vedanā*), six for perception (*saññā*), six for volition (*sañcetanā*), six for craving (*taṇhā*), six for thought (*vitakka*), six for discursive thinking

(*vicāra*). Thus, there are altogether sixty types of *Nibbāna* referring to the state of sixty functions of cessation.²²⁸ For this reason, Buddhists may say that even if merely one enlightened being has realized the different types of cessation depending on the different functions of cessation, there will be thousands of *Nibbāna*. However, the essence of *Nibbāna* is the one only (*eko-dhammo*), that is, the absolute peace (*santi-sukha*).

Is *Nibbāna* Entirely Blissful?

There is a philosophical argument of King Milinda about the blissful state of *Nibbāna* recorded in *Milinda-pañhā Pāḷi*, Kh-N. The main issue of *Nibbāna* is whether it is entirely blissful or mixed with suffering. As a matter of fact, his argumentative position is that *Nibbāna* cannot be entirely blissful, but must be mixed with suffering. Why he holds this position is due to the fact that there is some evidence of suffering in those who are seeking *Nibbāna*. It is obvious that when the meditators attempt to obtain the state of *Nibbāna*, they have to struggle in the field of the senses to conquer and subjugate the domain of the sense fields. They attempt to destroy all kinds of sensual happiness and to get rid of the five strands of sense pleasure that worldlings (*puthujjana*) obviously cling to. For the attainment of *Nibbāna*, the yogis are so much tortured by themselves that their bodies encounter many sufferings and their

minds suffer intensely painful feelings as well. Therefore, *Nibbāna* cannot be entirely blissful, but must be mixed with suffering.

With respect to King Milinda's view, Nāgasena confirms that *Nibbāna* is entirely blissful and is not mixed with suffering. His position is that the quest for *Nibbāna* is a kind of suffering, because it involves removing all kinds of pleasant things from meditators, such as pleasant visual objects, pleasant sounds, pleasant smells, pleasant tastes, and pleasant touches. However, he argues that this suffering is not called *Nibbāna*. Indeed, this is just a preliminary stage for the realization of *Nibbāna*. As a matter of fact, *Nibbāna* itself is entirely blissful, because the blissful state of *Nibbāna* has nothing to do with suffering due to desires.²²⁹

Moreover, there is one more thing that is particularly debatable with regard to the state of *Nibbāna*. For instance, if the state of *Nibbāna* has nothing to do with the six senses, then *Nibbāna* does not deal with any kind of happiness. In this world, people think that the state of happiness is directly related to the senses or the desires of the senses, such as happiness that is linked to a visible object or a beautiful sound and so on. Without the feeling or desire for sensual objects, there is no possibility to say that there is happiness under any circumstances. For that reason, the state of *Nibbāna* cannot be considered to deal with happiness, since feeling and perception exist no longer in the state of *Nibbāna*.

Let us take an example of a king who was in sound sleep in order to explore this issue further. There was a king who had fallen into sound sleep for almost one day after coming back from a tiring long journey. While he was soundly sleeping, his servants prepared the most delicious food and luxurious seats and tables for a dinner. When they were ready to serve him with food and juice, they attempted to wake him up. Because of their request to wake up, the king had to get up reluctantly. Instead of being pleased by their actions, the king even scolded them for waking him up. For this reason, his servants asked him: "Your majesty, why do you get angry with us? In reality, we woke you up for this wonderful dinner with the most delicious food. Indeed, your sound sleep has nothing to do with enjoyment and there is no feeling in sleep so there can be no enjoyment." Yet, the king replied: "Yes, you may say that my sleep contains no enjoyment and no feeling, but I prefer to have the sound sleep rather than your delicious food, although my dreamless sleep contains no taste. Don't disturb me when I sleep in future." In this case, it is obvious that sleep has nothing to do with feeling, but it is really wonderful, indeed. One can understand the peaceful state of *Nibbāna* as like that state of peaceful sleep in the story. Yet nothing can be compared to the absolute peace of *Nibbāna*, because the state of *Nibbāna* is beyond words, explanations or descriptions.²³⁰

With regard to the state of *Nibbāna*, there is only one way to know how the state of *Nibbāna* involves no feeling that is related to pleasurable sense

objects. The reason, which supports that *Nibbāna* may be blissful without the presence of pleasurable sense objects, is the cessation-state of *Nibbāna* (*nirodha-samāpatti*). During that attainment, which may last for seven days, the meditator continues to meditate without eating any food and without drinking any juice. They are very peaceful in that transcendental state and satisfied with their peaceful circumstance. The true state of *Nibbāna* is so deep, so profound that it is difficult to explain what kind of peace is involved in *Nibbāna*. This is because the state of absolute *Nibbāna* is a transcendental state that is beyond human language and the means of description.²³¹

Moreover, if one is able to distinguish the differences between happiness with feeling (*Vedayita-sukha*) and happiness without feeling (*Santi-sukha*), then one can compare the differences between the two and will understand which one will be more excellent than the other. Of the two kinds of happiness, *Vedayita-sukha* is illustrated as one which has a wonderful feeling due to great satisfaction with worldly possessions, such as wealth, success, power, all accompanied with great enjoyment and with pleasant happy feelings. This kind of feeling is directly known as desirable feeling. This means that if there is no feeling, then there is no happiness at all. In reality, *Vedayita-sukha* is a kind of mundane happiness, which deals with pleasant feelings. And it is subject to conditional circumstances.²³²

To the contrary, *Santi-sukha* is elucidated as a kind of happiness that is directly related to the cessation of all feelings. From the practical point of view, it is said that there exists no feeling, but the absolute peace in the state of *Nibbāna*. This state of *Nibbāna* is named *Santi-sukha* (happiness without feeling), also known as *Vimutti-sukha* (happiness of liberation). In Buddhism, the texts often refer to the state of *Nibbāna* as *Nibbāna-dhātu*, that is, the element of *Nibbāna*, which is characterized as supramundane happiness and unconditional peace. These kinds of absolute peace in the state of *Nibbāna* emerge due to liberation, that is, the liberation from mental and physical disturbances initially and eventually the liberation from aging, sickness, and death. It is understood that *Santi-sukha* is a kind of supramundane happiness, which has nothing to do with pleasant feeling or any kind of sensual feeling, but it is a transcendental state of peace and happiness. In reality, only enlightened beings can understand the transcendental state of peace and happiness through their enlightened wisdom.²³³

Does *Nibbāna* Exist in *Samsāra*?

The subject of *Nibbāna* is somehow attractive to Buddhist scholars, such as Shwe Kyin Sayādaw, Ledi Sayādaw, Mahāsi Sayādaw, and even non-Buddhists scholars, such as Steven Collins and Guy Richard Welbon. In Buddhism, doctrines and interpretations of the doctrines are related to a

technical and logical basis. They are also linked in the theoretical and practical sense. Some interpretations of doctrines may be controversial for Western thought, like the concept of nothingness and absolute cessation of *Nibbāna*. In this regard, some Western scholars, such as Friedrich Max Muller, attempt to define the concept of *Nibbāna* as "utter annihilation."²³⁴ For this reason, to clarify what is *Nibbāna* theoretically and to analyze what it means to Buddhism, several points about *Nibbāna* have been discussed in much detail. Yet it is indeed still necessary to discuss how to attain *Nibbāna* from a practical perspective, but that will be discussed later in Chapter 5.

As matter of fact, the information in Buddhism is very systematic, consistent and logical. For example, *Nibbāna* is included in the element of *Dhamma* (*dhamma-dhātu*). In this case, the element is called *dhātu*, because it bears its own intrinsic nature (*dhāretīti dhātu*). This kind of information is clear and technical for Buddhists and non-Buddhists, even if they use different languages. Yet, some statements seem to be controversial even within the same tradition of Buddhism. For instance, in the *Abhidhamma-saṅgaha*, *Nibbāna* is excluded from the category of five aggregates (*khandha-vimutta* or *khandha-saṅgaha-nissata*). This means that *Nibbāna* is neither mind nor matter.²³⁵ Yet in the commentary of *Yamaka* (that is, *Abhidhamma-Piṭaka-aṭṭhakathā* Vol. III), *Nibbāna* is included in the category of a mental state. The following is its statement: *Nāmadhammoti cattāro arūpino khandhā Nibbānaṇica* -- This means

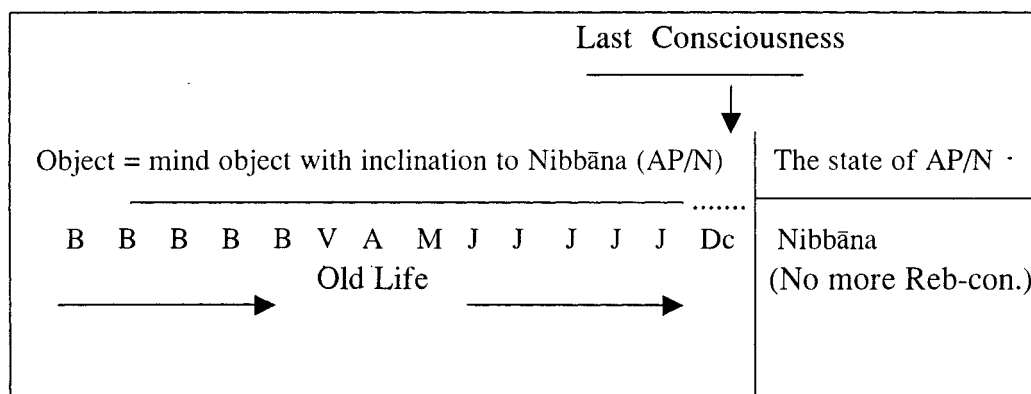
that *Nāma-dhamma* (mind or mentality) contains the four aggregates (*arūpa khandhas*): feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), mental formation (*saṅkhāra*) and consciousness (*viññāṇa*), and *Nibbāna*.²³⁶

The position of this statement is also consistent with the statement that appears in *Kathāvatthu Pāli, Abhidhamma-Piṭaka*. That statement is: *Aññe khandhā, aññaṃ nibbānaṃ, añño puggaloti na hevaṃ vatthabbe* (It is not supposed to say that the aggregates, *Nibbāna*, that is the individuality of an enlightened being, are totally different from one another).²³⁷ This is because *Nibbāna* arises depending on the aggregates. Therefore, *Nibbāna* and the aggregates are not considered to be different from one another.²³⁸ However, the five aggregates are not directly *Nibbāna* either. This means that as soon as an enlightened being enters *Nibbāna*, the absolute state of *Nibbāna* spontaneously takes place in *Pari-nibbuta* for that individual, or more precisely the element of *Nibbāna* entity. The position of enlightened beings is considered to be a transcendental state as the element of *Nibbāna* entity, but there are no longer conceptual names for them as there were in their *Arahant* identity, since he or she has entered the state of complete *Nibbāna*.

This transitional state of *Nibbāna* in the individuality of enlightened beings before entering the state of complete *Nibbāna* and the absence of that identity after entering the state of complete *Nibbāna* is very confusing in a theoretical sense. However, those who have some *Abhidhamma* knowledge, may

understand how the mental process takes place in the state of *Nibbāna*. There are two remarkable Pāli scholars who have discussed the state of *Nibbāna*. Of the two, Shwe Kyin Sayādaw strongly holds to his position with a reference to the statements: *Aññe khandhā, aññam nibbānam-ti nahevam vattabbe* (It is not said that the aggregates, *Nibbāna*, the individuality of an enlightened being, are totally different from one another). In fact, soon after the death of enlightened beings, *Nibbāna* takes place almost at the same time. He illustrates how the process of *Nibbāna* takes place.²³⁹

Table 4. The Process of the Absolute Peace of *Nibbāna*
(*Nibbāna-vīthi*)



Key Words: AP/N = Absolute peace of *Nibbāna*; AP/D = Absolute peace of destiny; B = stream of *bhavanga* (life-continuum consciousness); V = vibrational *bhavanga* (*bhavanga-calana*); A = arrested *bhavanga* (*bhavangupaccheda*); M = mind door (*manodvāravajjana*); J = *javana* (cognitive process); Dc = death consciousness (*cuti-citta*); N = Absolute state of cessation (*Nibbāna*) (Rebirth consciousness no longer takes place in *Nibbāna*).²⁴⁰

Shwe Kyin Sayādaw points out that there is no *Nibbāna-vīthi* (the process of absolute peace of *Nibbāna*) from within the Buddhist traditional texts before now, because the state of *Nibbāna* does not directly include the process of five

aggregates so that former teachers (*porāṇācariya*) ignore mentioning the process of *Nibbāna-vīthi*. Yet since the process of *Nibbāna* takes place in enlightened individuals, right after their death, it is possible to describe the process of *Nibbāna*, as in this possibility mentioned above. However, it is said that his statement is based on the canonical statement: *Nibbānampi khandhapatibaddhameva* (the process of *Nibbāna* links the cessation of the five aggregates)²⁴¹ and *pañcannam khandhānam nirodho nibbānam* (the cessation of the five aggregates is called *Nibbāna*).²⁴²

With regard to where *Nibbāna* exists, Shwe Kyin Sayādaw believes that *Nibbāna* relatively exists in the five aggregates, but the five aggregates are not *Nibbāna*. The reason why he emphasizes this is that since *Loka-nirodha* (the cessation of the world) is considered to be *Nibbāna*, *Nibbāna* cannot arise out of nothing, but it arises from the five aggregates. This means that while an enlightened being is still alive, the state of *Loka-nirodha* takes place in his or her individual form of the five aggregates. In reality, the state of *Nibbāna* doesn't come to exist in the enlightened individual from somewhere else.²⁴³

Another Buddhist scholar, Bhikkhu Buddhādāsa describes the position of *Nibbāna* from a different standpoint. To get a clear picture of *Nibbāna*, he points out that *Nibbāna* exists in *saṃsāra*.²⁴⁴ His position is that *Nibbāna* exists in *saṃsāra*, but he rejects the view that *Nibbāna* is *saṃsāra*, *saṃsāra* is *Nibbāna*. The reason why he describes *Nibbāna* in this way is that unenlightened beings

continually wander in *saṃsāra*, until they reach *Nibbāna*. He said, "I maintain that *Nibbāna* exists in *saṃsāra*, that the foolish (*andha-puthujjana*) will never find it and that the wise (*kalyāṇa-puthujjana*) will find it without having to look outside themselves."²⁴⁵ As a matter of fact, both these eminent scholars proclaim their views, quoting the same Pāli source in the *Rohitassa-Sutta*, Sa-N. The source is the following.

*Na kho panāyaṃ āvuso appatvā lokassa antaṃ dukkhassa antakiriyaṃ vadāmi. Api ca khvāhaṃ āvuso imasmimyeva vyāmamatte kaḷevare sasaññimhi samanake lokaṇca paññāpemi lokasamudayaṇca lokanirodhaṇca lokanirodhagāminiṇca paṭipadanti.*²⁴⁶

However, friend, I say that without having reached the end of the world (the five aggregates), there is no making an end to suffering. It is, friend, in just this fathom-high carcass (body) endowed with perception, and mind that I make known the world, the origin of the world, the cessation of the world (*Nibbāna*), and the way leading to the cessation of the world.²⁴⁷

In terms of the above statement, it is understood that the cessation of the world (*dukkha-nirodha*) means the cessation of craving. Craving of existence is theoretically considered to be the opposite of *Nibbāna*. There is a statement that is recorded in the *Netti Pāli*, Kh-N. The statement reads: *Taphakkhayā dukkhakkhayo, dukkhakkhayā nibbānaṃ* (Dependent on the cessation of craving, the cessation of suffering takes place; dependent on the cessation of suffering, *Nibbāna* arises).²⁴⁸ In this regard, Shwe Kyin Sayādaw emphasizes that because of the cessation of suffering (*dukkha*), *Nibbāna* arises, but it is not because of *Nibbāna*, that suffering has gone.

Moreover, in the issue raised in the above statement, Bhikkhu

Buddhadāsa attempts to rephrase his original claim,

Nibbāna and *saṃsāra* exist together in this fathom-long body of ours. If we have not yet attained perfect *Nibbāna*, we continually switch back and forth, sometimes in *Nibbāna*, sometimes in *saṃsāra*. Whenever we take our sensory perceptions and concoct the sense of me-and-mine, we are in *saṃsāra*. When we overcome our addiction to ignorance (*avijjā*), we will experience a *Nibbāna* that is infinite, changeless and eternal.²⁴⁹

For him, the statement: "*Nibbāna* is permanent (*nicca*) and eternal (*sassata*)" means that after uprooting all defilement, one can reach *Nibbāna* which always exists. This kind of absolute peace of *Nibbāna* can never revert to *saṃsāra*. Therefore, *Nibbāna* is considered to be permanent and eternal, absolutely peaceful.

The Critical Issue With *Nibbāna*

Now let us consider the critical issue of *Nibbāna* as "utter annihilation." It is necessary to reflect on the relation between what Buddhist texts say about *Nibbāna* and what interpreters think about *Nibbāna*. Buddhism doesn't try to apply its doctrines as an ideological discourse, but modifies its doctrines for practical usefulness. Regarding the critical issue of annihilation in relation to *Nibbāna*, if one uses the word "annihilation" for *Nibbāna*, then this interpretation necessitates readjusting its meaning with technical interpretation. If one argues that *Nibbāna* is nothing but annihilationism, then this kind of

argument needs to analyze whether it is so or not. In reality, the concept of annihilationism is not relevant when considering *Nibbāna*. *Nibbāna* is something but it is beyond human language.

As has been described in this chapter, there are many methods to amplify its qualities and manifestations. For the most part Pāli scholars postulate that the state of *Nibbāna* truly exists. However, some aforementioned Western interpreters, Hindus, and Christians maintain their position that *Nibbāna* is annihilationism. Buddhist scholars attempt to understand what is the true meaning of *Nibbāna*. It is necessary to readjust the meaning of *Nibbāna* to get rid of the interpretation of annihilationism. Let us suppose that the Western interpreters proclaim that they believe in the position that upholds the idea that enlightened beings no longer exist after their death; then their view is nothing but annihilationism. Their view is relatively not wrong, because they believe that enlightened beings are no longer in the thirty-one planes of existences. Yet the final state of *Nibbāna* is not absolute cessation, but absolute peace. As a matter of fact, the concept of *Nibbāna* has nothing to do with the view of annihilation technically, since *Nibbāna* practically exists as the unconditioned ultimate reality. One can reach the state of *Nibbāna* by means of practice, because it exists unconditionally in the transcendental state.

Regarding the view of annihilation or non-existence of *Nibbāna*, Shwe Kyin Sayādaw argues that if one believes in *Nibbāna* as annihilation, then the

view will fall into *ucchedadiṭṭhi* (the wrong view of annihilationism). That is why he firmly holds his position that *Nibbāna* truly exists. The reason why he holds this position is that these ultimate things exist as *Nibbānatana-dhātu* (the element of absolute peace), and *Asaṅkhata-dhātu* (the unconditioned existent). And a kind of invisible transcendental light also exists in the state of *Nibbāna*. Yet no worldlings (*andha-puthujjana*) can see the fine transcendental light, because the transcendental light is extraordinary, shiny, very clear and invisible to the ordinary eyes. For instance, no ordinary human beings can see even the divine light, which exists in the heavenly beings. The transcendental light is much subtler than the lights that exist in the human world including visible and invisible lights. Thus, he firmly claims that *Nibbāna* truly exists.²⁵⁰

In terms of the existence of *Nibbāna*, Ledi Sayādaw emphasizes it in a different way. Actually there is not only one *Nibbāna* that existed long ago, but also it is existing in each individual and each of the enlightened beings has its own *Nibbāna* after their death. He also agrees that *Nibbāna* exists as ultimate reality as the "Unconditioned Existence" (*asaṅkhata-dhātu*), which is a very fine and subtle side of the transcendental state that is beyond logic and empirical statement. Since it has arisen in each *Nibbuta*-individual, *Nibbāna* eternally exists. The state of absolute peace naturally grants the *Nibbuta*-individual the qualities of "Unconditioned Existence," qualities such as "being" ageless (*nicca*), "being" timeless (*dhuta*), and "being" eternal (*sassata*). However, he points out

that the former teacher's (*pubbāṇācariya*) statement is not comfortable for him, because the absolute peace of the unconditioned existence (*asaṅkhata-dhātu*) already exists, while the enlightened beings are still alive. His emphasis is that while enlightened beings are still alive, the unconditional state of *Nibbāna* already exists. And after their entering *Nibbāna* (that is, their death), the absolute peace of the unconditioned existence still exists. Thus he clarifies that the experience of *Nibbāna*, or "*Diṭṭhadhammika-samparāyika-Nibbāna*" (the realization of present life), can be attained by enlightened beings in this very life.²⁵¹

Another Pāli scholar, named Mahāgandāyone Sayādaw prefers to interpret the existence of *Nibbāna* in his own way. The state of *Nibbāna* should not be considered to be a specific distinction of mind (*nāma-vīsesa*) and a specific distinction of matter (*rūpa-vīsesa*), although in the state of *Nibbāna* there are no longer the existence of consciousness (*citta*), mental states (*cetasika*), and matter or corporeality (*rūpa*). And he also disagrees that *Nibbāna-dhātu* (the element of *Nibbāna*) is to be considered the state of nothingness (*abhāva*), but in fact it is to be considered the state of absolute peace (*santi-sukha*). He supports the view, that *Nibbāna* has its own light that no ordinary people are able to see. This condition is like the original state of consciousness that is naturally very bright and glittering when its natural state is free from defilements. Defilements are types of mental states that are able to

defile one's mind so that the mind will be dim and gloomy. Since there exists the specifically distinct light in the state of *Nibbāna*, for him, there is no objection to the view that *Nibbāna* truly exists.²⁵²

There is a controversial view of *Nibbāna* among the Pāli scholars. There is a well known Pāli scholar, named Mahāsi Sayādaw whose view is different from the aforementioned scholars, regarding the interpretation for the Pāli phrase: *Sabbato pabham* (entirely light). He denies the view of light in *Nibbāna*. There is no extraordinary light that exists in the state of *Nibbāna* according to him. However, he agrees that *Nibbāna* is a state of absolute peace (*asaṅkhata-dhātu*) and that there is the existence of ultimate reality.²⁵³ In fact, he strongly rejects the view that *Nibbāna* exists as an element of lucidity. He affirms his position with the following statement.

Nibbāna is not a mansion or a palace. It is no city. It is not light. There is no luminescence in *Nibbāna*. It has no element of lucidity and coolness. Mansions, palaces, cities, light, luminescence, lucidity and coolness are not unconditioned, *asaṅkhāra*, or ultimate realities, *paramattha*.²⁵⁴

Looking at the above statement, Mahāsi Sayādaw interprets that *Nibbāna* has no sign, no color and no light, but the absolute peace of ultimate reality. As a matter of fact, he prefers to interpret that *Nibbāna* is free from the influence of defilement (*kilesas*), past *kammās* are rendered ineffective and they are utterly unable to bring about the formation of a new existence. Thus it is said

that *Nibbāna* is for enlightened beings, those beings, which can reach it with the cessation of all defilements.

Based on the aforementioned scholars' statement, it can be affirmed that the state of *Nibbāna* exists, but that *Nibbāna* is not annihilation. Knowing *Nibbāna* as annihilation is a mere interpretation, but knowing *Nibbāna* as absolute peace is a true realization of *Nibbāna*. Although *Nibbāna* has many names theoretically, its character is only one, that is, the transcendental state of absolute peace. And the most remarkable significance of *Nibbāna* is liberation, that is, liberation from three worlds: world of formation (*saṅkhāra-loka*), world of beings (*satta-loka*), and world of location (*okāsa-loka*). Of the three, the world of formation refers to the five aggregates that are under the oppression of conditions. The world of beings not only refers to visible beings, but also invisible beings in this universe. The world of location refers to the thirty-one planes of existences where beings are born. The enlightened beings will have the experience of complete liberation from the suffering world, after entering the absolute peace of *Nibbāna*.²⁵⁵

Nibbāna Exists for Enlightened Beings

This study finally draws the conclusion that *Nibbāna* is the existence of something that is linked to the transcendental entity or transcendental element called *Dhamma-dhātu* (the truth of the *Dhamma*). According to Theravāda

Buddhism, *Nibbāna* is nothing but ultimate reality that doesn't go beyond absolute peace. Absolute peace (*Nibbāna*) is often named as ultimate peace and unconditional happiness. This kind of peace and happiness is immeasurable in the conceptual sense, because it has no empirical quality. In this regard, some kinds of happiness and peace are subject to empiricism in this universe. Even then the happiness of the celestial beings is beyond the empirical experience for humans, for only celestial beings can obtain the celestial happiness. Similarly, only enlightened beings can realize what surpramundane happiness is. This condition is something like a man who is blind, since he was born. For him, it is hard to accept the existence of color or light that ordinary people can see. In this regard, the blind man is likened to a wordling (*puthujjana*). For the wordling, it is also hard to accept the existence of *Nibbāna*, which truly exists for enlightened beings.

The concept of *Nibbāna* is philosophically very complicated in Buddhism, but practically it can be understood and realized. There is no universal agreement about the concept of *Nibbāna* among Buddhist traditions either. However, to clarify the view of *Nibbāna* from a Theravāda perspective, one cannot ignore the original sources of the Pāli texts and Pāli literature that Theravāda Buddhist countries highly acknowledge.

The Theravāda Buddhist countries are Sri Lanka, Burma (Myanmar), Thailand, Cambodia and Laos. Of the five major countries, Burma is the one of

the five countries where the traditional Theravāda Buddhism has been maintained with Pāli canonical texts. Likewise Sri Lanka and Thailand have maintained this tradition of the Pāli texts and Pāli literature. Burma has also sustained its precious Buddhist values and cultures for over a thousand year. The tradition tirelessly provides Buddhists monks, nuns and lay people with religious training in every possible way. The training includes theoretical and practical aspects for the sake of *Buddha-sāsana* (the Buddha's dispensation). In Theravāda Buddhist countries, Buddhist monks are very careful to interpret the existence of *Nibbāna* in order to avoid falling into two extreme views: annihilationism and eternalism.

Among the Buddhist scholarly monks in Burmese Buddhism, Shwe Kyin Sayādaw was a well known Pāli scholar, especially well known for his book, *Gambhīrāgambhīra-mahānibbutadīpanī Kyan* and his view of *Nibbāna*. His view is that *Nibbāna* is not absolute extinction nor is it annihilationism either, because *Nibbāna* has nothing to do with absolute extinction, but it has to do with absolute peace and happiness. The existence of *Nibbāna* is absolutely present. In the state of *Nibbāna*, the existence of the five aggregates comes to an end. In this regard, it is said that *Nibbāna* is like non-existence. Yet there remains absolute peace and the deathless element (*Nibbāna-dhātu*). In reality, *Nibbāna* exists for enlightened beings.

Seeing the aforementioned views of *Nibbāna*, from the point of view of theoretical aspects, it seems that it is so profound that there is no way to cover everything, that is, every aspect of *Nibbāna*. From this point onwards, this study will not discuss in detail what is *Nibbāna*, but rather will focus on the aspect of experiential realization. In Buddhism, practice and theory are equally important to understand the essence of the *Dhamma*. Buddhists emphasize that theories or studying theories (*pariyatti*) are for knowledge, but they value practice of meditation (*paṭipatti*) more than theories because it provides liberation through spiritual wisdom (*paññā*).

Spiritual wisdom involves insight wisdom (*vipassanā-ñāṇa*) and path and fruition knowledge, also known as "enlightenment" (*magga-phala-ñāṇa*). Insight wisdom here means the intuitive understanding flashing forth and exposing the truth of the impermanency (*anicca*), the suffering or unsatisfactory (*dukkha*), and the impersonal and unsubstantial nature of all corporeal and mental phenomena of existence (*anatta*). Wisdom (*paññā*) has to be developed along with the two other trainings: morality (*sīla*) and concentration (*samādhi*). Insight wisdom is not the result of a mere intellectual understanding, but is obtained through direct meditative observation of one's own phenomena that contain physical and mental processes. The culmination of insight meditation, known as mindfulness meditation leads one directly to the stages of path and fruition knowledge.²⁵⁶ However, according to Buddhist perspectives, it is understood that

study of theories are not wisdom, but wisdom can be obtained through study of theories together with individual practice of meditation. Buddhists postulate that without practice, no one is able to attain the absolute peace of *Nibbāna*. The study of meditation methods is necessary to fulfill the aims of this study. Therefore, the following chapter will mainly discuss Buddhist meditation and methods for a better understanding of the concept of *Nibbāna* with practical aspects.

CHAPTER 5 BUDDHIST MEDITATION TOWARDS LIBERATION

Buddhist Concept of Liberation

This chapter will emphasize Theravāda Buddhist meditation and the different types of methods, applying them to different levels of knowledge. Some experiences of meditation will link to the researcher's own meditational practice. The objective is to explore how Buddhist meditation leads to spiritual liberation and how meditative experience assists in understanding the meaning of *Nibbāna*. The heart of Buddhist doctrines is that practical experience is more important than theoretical and intellectual appreciation. This means, above all, that without practice, no one is able to attain *Nibbāna*. Indeed, the inclusion of meditation practice is necessary to fulfill the aim of this study. This chapter will mainly investigate the following statements. First this study will discuss the concept of spiritual liberation and the primary objective of meditation. Secondly it will explore the methods of Theravāda Buddhist meditation. Thirdly, it will describe the major types of Buddhist meditation and the progress of insight. Lastly, it will analyze how the meditation leads one to realize the absolute peace of *Nibbāna*.

Buddhists mostly prefer to say that they wish to attain *Nibbāna* instead of understanding what *Nibbāna* really means. And so, often they state that one can attain *Nibbāna* through the practice of meditation. The state of *Nibbāna*, the

essence of which signifies deathlessness, the end of suffering, and liberation from bondage, is the highest goal for Buddhists. They think that *Nibbāna* is within the reach of all. However, it is difficult for them to explain the essence of *Nibbāna* philosophically. Yet the philosophical statement has been often brought up by non-Buddhist practitioners: If *Nibbāna* doesn't mean the absolute extinction, then what kind of release does *Nibbāna* signify?

Most Buddhists will explain that *Nibbāna* is "ultimate reality" and they might say that it is difficult to describe the essence of *Nibbāna* for those who have not yet attained the state of *Nibbāna*. That accords with what is said in the *Abhidhamma*: the state of *Nibbāna* is "beyond words, languages, or reasonings (*atakkāvacara*)" so that no one except enlightened beings can understand its true essence through worldly concepts. Enlightened beings can understand what *Nibbāna* is through their insight wisdom. Since Buddhists know of the benefits of meditation generated by insight wisdom in individuals, they make their efforts towards the practice of meditation. This is how Buddhists approach their spiritual path. Based on their attitude towards the teachings of the Buddha, they affirm that *vipassanā* (insight) meditation is a gateway to reach *Nibbāna*.

Regarding the doctrine of *Nibbāna*, there is a connection between insight and *Nibbāna*. In this context, *Nibbāna* or *asaṅkhata-dhātu* can be translated as freedom, or liberation (*vimutti*). Meditation methods can be connected to the method of the "Noble Eightfold Path (*aṭṭha-maggaṅga*)" and the method of the

"Four Foundations of Mindfulness (*sati-paṭṭhāna*)" as well. As a matter of fact, the *Dhamma* given by the Buddha can be divided into two aspects: the doctrine and the practice.

The principal formulation of the doctrine is the Four Noble Truths; the principal formulation of the practice is the Noble Eightfold Path. The two, however, are closely interwoven: for, as we shall see, the Noble Eightfold Path is the fourth of the Four Noble Truths, while the first step of the Noble Eightfold Path, Right View, means understanding the 'Four Noble Truths.'²⁵⁷

In the "Noble Eightfold Path," Right View is the first factor of the path and the essential guide for all other factors of the path. The active counterpart of right view also is linked to right conduct with the ideal of moral and spiritual excellence in body, speech, and mind. Right Mindfulness is the seventh factor of the path, that is, awareness of every single moment in body, speech, and thought. The power of mindfulness is to generate insight knowledge and to obtain liberation from suffering.

Mindfulness meditation makes possible the progress of insight during intensive meditation. The progress of insight consists of different levels of liberation (*vimutti*). However, according to the *Nibbānadhātu Sutta*, Kh-N, there are mainly two levels of liberation. They are: (1) psychological level of liberation (*saupādisesa-nibbāna dhātu*) and biological level of liberation (*anupādisesa-nibbānadhātu*). *Saupādisesa-nibbāna-dhātu* here means *Nibbāna* element with the remainder of the phenomena of conditioned existence, while

Anupādisesa-nibbāna-dhātu is *Nibbāna* element without any remainder of conditioned existence.

Psychological liberation is a kind of spiritual liberation that means liberation from mental destruction due to craving (*taṇhā*) or desire (*samudaya*). For instance, when craving or desire together with ignorance (*avijjā*) are eliminated, one can remove the mental defilements, such as unhappiness, worry, sorrow, sadness and other mental sufferings.²⁵⁸ Psychological liberation directly refers to the spiritual liberation, which is linked to mind. When one's mind is released from the fever of lust (*rāga*) or craving (*taṇhā*), one can psychologically liberate oneself from mental suffering which involves the mental factors of unhappiness, depression and so on.

According to the *Abhidhamma*, peace and happiness are linked to an inner peaceful state of mind. For enlightened beings, after attaining the state of *Nibbāna* in this very life, the supreme peace and happiness are experienced, called *saupādisesa-Nibbāna* in Pāli, that is, liberation from mental suffering. In the *Maṅgala Sutta*, the statement has been recorded that since enlightened beings (*Arahants*) have freed themselves from craving or desire together with ignorance, they can never again be touched by fear and anxiety. Though eight worldly conditions (*loka-dhamma*), such as Gain (*lābha*) or Loss (*alābha*); Honor (*yasa*) or Dishonor (*ayasa*); Praise (*pasāṇsa*) or Blame (*ninda*), and Happiness (*sukha*) or sufferings (*dukkha*), reach them, their mind is not shaken at all

(*cittam yassa na kampaṭi*). They are sorrowless (*asoka*), stainless (*virāga*), and safe (*khema*).²⁵⁹ In Buddhism, this kind of psychological freedom can be named "Psychological Liberation."

"Biological Liberation" takes place, when enlightened beings enter the state of absolute *Nibbāna*. Meanwhile, the process of the mind and body of enlightened beings, these so-called identities of *Arahants*, totally stops and its *kammic* force comes to an end. After that, the round of their rebirths is broken for them. This kind of state is known as *Anupādisesa Nibbāna* (*Nibbāna* without remaining), or "Biological Liberation." It is understood that after the enlightened beings have attained the absolute peace of *Nibbāna*, there is no residue of the elements of conditioned existence. The process of the mental and physical phenomena no longer exists, but only the deathless element and absolute peace exist. This kind of state is said to be the Unborn (*appatisandī*), Unmade (*anupapattī*), Unbecome (*ajāta*), Unconditioned (*asaṅkhata*).²⁶⁰

In Buddhist perspective, spiritual freedom is also named *vimutti* (liberation). In this context, what does spiritual freedom mean to Buddhists? As has been mentioned before, spiritual freedom contains two levels: psychological liberation and biological liberation. However, meditation techniques help one understand what spiritual liberation means practically. Moreover, spiritual liberation is characterized as the taste of liberation (*vimuttirasa*). Indeed, the experience of the *dhmma* contains no sensory taste. Yet the state of the

dhamma metaphorically consists of qualities of *dhamma* taste, the taste of spiritual liberation. In the *Pahārāda Sutta*, An-N, the Buddha addressed the matter thus:

*Seyyathāpi Pahārāda mahāsamuddo ekaraso loṇaraso, evamevaṃ kho Pahārāda ayaṃ dhammavinayo ekaraso vimuttiraso. yampi Pahārāda ayaṃ dhammavinayo ekaraso vimuttiraso. ayaṃ pahārāda imasmim dhammavinaye chaṭṭho acchariyo abbhuto dhammo. yaṃ disvā disvā bhikkhū imasmim dhammavinaye abhiramanti.*²⁶¹

Pahārāda, just as the great ocean has but one taste, the taste of salt; even so this *Dhamma* and Discipline (*Dhamma-Vinaya*) has but one taste, the taste of liberation (*vimutti-rasa*). This is the sixth wonderful and marvellous quality in this *Dhamma* and Discipline, which the monks perceive by reason of which they take delight in it.²⁶²

In this regard, the spiritual liberation is fundamentally free from craving and ignorance that cause the whole mass of suffering, such as rebirth, aging, sickness, death, sorrow, lamentation and all kinds of mental and physical sufferings. If there is no craving for worldly pleasure, no clinging to existences (rebirth), and no ignorance about daily activities, there is no suffering for beings. In Buddhism, the realization of the absolute cessation of suffering is considered to be the attainment of *Nibbāna*. Yet Buddhist meditation teachers are often asked: "How does one attain *Nibbāna*?" To this question, the simple answer of the meditation teachers is to purify the mind (*citta-visuddhi*). What methods does one apply to practice? Again, the simple answer is to apply the Noble Eightfold Path (*aṭṭha-maggaṅga*) which consists of eight factors for the practice.²⁶³ Thus someone may ask endless philosophical questions about

Nibbāna. Yet one may not understand what is the essence of *Nibbāna*, until one has one's own experience of that taste of the *Dhamma* toward *Nibbāna* through meditation.

The Objective of Buddhist Meditation Is to Purify the Mind

In general, the practice of meditation has many objectives based on the different traditional backgrounds or religious attitudes. For some traditions, meditation is to get a peaceful mind, while for others, it is to cure physical diseases through mind power; for still others it is to obtain psychic power; and for others it may be to attain something else. Since the traditions are different from each other, their objectives in meditation are different from one another.

However, the primary purpose of Buddhist meditation is, specifically, to purify the mind and to attain *Nibbāna*.²⁶⁴ In addition, the meditation is undertaken through the practice of tranquility (*samatha*) meditation in order to develop concentration and a peaceful state of mind; while the practice of insight (*vipassanā*) meditation is undertaken to develop the intuitive insight into the impermanence of, the misery or the unsatisfactoriness of, and the impersonality of all mental and physical phenomena of existence. The components of existence are the five groups of aggregates.²⁶⁵

To be more specific, Theravāda Buddhist meditation emphasizes that *vipassanā* meditation, also called mindfulness meditation is the essential way to

attain *Nibbāna*, by purifying the mind.²⁶⁶ Without purifying the mind, it is difficult to understand what *Nibbāna* is. Yet there is an issue which arises in Buddhist meditation. How does one understand the connection between the state of the purification of mind and the state of the realization of *Nibbāna*? To purify the mind is to help oneself understand things clearly, such as the process of phenomena including mind and body and ultimate realities including *citta* (consciousness), *cetasika* (mental factors), *rūpa* (matter), and *Nibbāna*. One sees that these things truly exist. Buddhism stresses how important concentration, also known as "Purification of Mind," is to develop insight wisdom (*vipassanāñāṇa*) which leads one to realize the nature of *Nibbāna*. In the *Samādhi Sutta*, the Buddha addressed this matter as follows.

*Samādhim bhikkhave bhāvētha, samāhito bhikkhave bhikkhu
yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti. kiñca yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti. rūpassa samudayañca
atthagamañca. vedanāya samudayañca atthagamañca. saññāya
samudayañca atthagamañca. saṅkhāraṇaṃ samudayañca atthagamañca.
viññāṇassa samudayañca. atthagamañca.*²⁶⁷

Bhikkhus, develop concentration. A *bhikkhu* who is concentrated understands things as they really are. And what does he understand as it really is? The origin and passing away of form; the origin and passing away of feeling; the origin and passing away of perception; the origin and passing away of volitional formations; the origin and passing away of consciousness.²⁶⁸

To understand what the Buddha really means in this text, one needs to apply mindfulness meditation, using the method of the "Four Foundations of Mindfulness." At the beginning of the practice, one will come to know the

distinctive realities: mind and body. Regarding the word "mind," this study will recognize two functions of mind: the function of consciousness (*citta*) and the function of mental factors (*cetasikas*). As a matter of fact, the meditators are able to know the distinctive realities, their distinctive functions through mindfulness meditation.

According to the *Dhammasaṅgani*, *Abhidhamma-Piṭaka* Vol. I, consciousness (*citta*) is divided into the following groups: (1) *kusala-citta* (wholesome consciousness), (2) *akusala-citta* (unwholesome consciousness), and (3) *abyākata-citta* (resultant consciousness [*vipāka*] and functional consciousness [*kiriya*]) categorizing altogether eighty-nine types in brief. The mental factors consist of fifty-two types which include initial application of mind (*vitakka*), feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), intention (*cetanā*), mindfulness (*sati*), concentration (*ekaggatā*) and wisdom (*paññā*) and so on. In the *Abhidhamma-Piṭaka*, however, the four types of ultimate realities (*paramattha-dhamma*) are put into three groups. The Pāli statement is: *Kusalā dhammā, Akusalā dhammā, abyākatā dhammā*: [wholesome *dhamma*, unwholesome *dhamma*, and (kammically) indeterminate *dhamma*, which is composed of resultant (*vipāka*) and functional (*kiriya*) *dhamma*]. According to the *Abhidhamma-Piṭaka*, the wholesome *dhamma* here refers to all wholesome consciousness (*twenty-one-kusala-cittas*) and the associated wholesome mental states (*thirty-eight-cetasikas*). The unwholesome *dhamma* refers to all

unwholesome consciousness (*twelve-akusala-cittas*) and the associated unwholesome mental states (*twenty-seven-cetasikas*). And the *Abyākata dhamma* consists of the rest of the four ultimate realities. They are the resultant consciousness (*thirty-six-vipāka-cittas*) and the associated mental states (*thirty-three-cetasikas*), the functional consciousness (*twenty-kiriya-cittas*) and the associated mental states (*thirty-five-cetasikas*), matter (*twenty-eight-rūpas*).²⁶⁹ Yet a meditator will not notice all of the functions of *citta* and *cetasika* through the power of meditation. However, he or she will know most of the obvious mind functions, such as greed, hate, restlessness and so on.

With further practice, however, the meditation will explore more deeply both the functions of consciousness (*citta*) and the mental states (*cetasikas*). Of the two, the consciousness (*citta*) acts in a primary role, and the mental factors take their positions in a secondary role. Without having practical experience, it is difficult to distinguish between the nature of consciousness and the nature of mental factors through mere theories. These fifty-two types of mental factors naturally associate with each other and consciousness in various combinations. Mental factors arise together and cease together with consciousness.²⁷⁰

In this regard, if one wishes to distinguish the function of *citta* (consciousness) and *cetasika* (mental states), one can start meditation applying the various methods of meditation, such as mindfulness meditation and tranquility meditation. It is best if one starts with the most prominent object

within one's own phenomenal experience. In Theravāda Buddhist meditation, the most commonly used methods are *ānāpāna-sati* (awareness of inhaling and exhaling) as well as *kāyagatā-sati* (awareness of the bodily actions or the abdominal moment of rising and falling). During the practice, in order to get a meditative level of full awareness on the object, one needs to get a closer look at the object and continuously observe it without speculating, thinking, or expecting. Since one's concentrative power is able to get a closer look at the object, one will overcome mental and physical distractions that arise from moment to moment. In Buddhism, peaceful mind and penetrative mind are known as *samādhi* (concentration). The concentrated mind leads to the "Purification of the Mind (*citta-visuddhi*)."²⁷¹

According to the *Aṅguttara-Nikāya*, mind is naturally luminous. This means that when one's mind is free from defilements and mental distractions, the mind is bright or emits light. This kind of luminous state of mind is also known as the "Purification of the Mind." However, the mind sometimes becomes dim and defiled. With regard to this, the Pāli canonical text provides the facts as to why this is so. The statement about it comes from the *Paṇihita-acchavagga Sutta*, An-N.

*pabhassaramidaṃ bhikkhave cittaṃ. tañca kho āgantukehi upakkilesehi upakkiliṭṭhaṃ. pabhassaramidaṃ bhikkhave cittaṃ. tañca kho āgantukehi upakkilesehi vippamuttanti.*²⁷²

This mind, O monks, is luminous (*pabhassaramidaṃ bhikkhave cittaṃ*), but it is defiled by adventitious defilements. This mind, O monks, is luminous, and it is freed from adventitious defilements.²⁷³

In this way, the Buddha discovered that the mind is naturally luminous,

but it was not so all the time due to the defilements. As has been seen from the aforementioned statement, mind is the starting point for mental development and the focal point for the application of the meditation method. Not only this, but also it is the culminating point for the liberated and purified mind of those who wish to attain *Nibbāna*. Buddhist texts state that all good arises in mind, while all evil arises in mind as well. Whatsoever there is of good, the good will be connected with mind, and whatsoever there is of evil, the evil will be connected with mind too.²⁷⁴ One's mind should be purified from all mental defilements in order to know the original state of the mind, and actually all reality, including both the nature of mind and the nature of matter. That is to say that one must know the true mind that has been defiled with mental obstructive qualities in order to purify the mind; to free the mind that is in bondage one must get rid of craving, desire, and ignorance.

The Fundamental Methods of Buddhist Meditation

As has been mentioned, there are two basic types of *kammaṭṭhāna* (meditations): (1) *samatha-kammaṭṭhāna* (tranquility meditation) and (2) *vipassanā-kammaṭṭhāna* (insight meditation).²⁷⁵ *Kammaṭṭhāna* literally means

"workplace." To what does the workplace refer? The workplace is the mind for the meditator who wants to develop the spiritual attainments in the field of contemplation. It is the workplace for the meditator to develop the special meditative attainments. Yet in Buddhist practice the word "*bhāvanā*" has been often used. *Bhāvanā* literally means mental development. Within the Buddhist context, the word "meditation" derives from the Pāli word "*bhāvanā*." There are two types of *bhāvanā*: (1) *samatha-bhāvanā* (tranquility meditation) and (2) *vipassanā-bhāvanā* (insight meditation). They are the same as the two types of *kammaṭṭhāna* (meditations). Of the two, only insight meditation is a distinctively Buddhist form of meditation. The other forms of meditation are found in non-Buddhist schools of meditation also. The other forms of meditation here refer to *samatha* meditation. In *samatha* meditation there are forty subjects altogether.²⁷⁶

Regarding *samatha* (tranquility) meditation, the word "*samatha*" denotes quietness of mind and eradication of mental distractions. The word "*samādhi*" (concentration) is similar in meaning to *samatha* (tranquility). Technically, *samādhi* is often defined in Buddhist texts as *ekaggatā* (one-pointness of mind). It mostly appears in *jhāna* meditation. There are eight meditative attainments in this highly developed concentration: *rūpa-jhānas* (the four fine-material-sphere) and *arūpa-jhānas* (the four immaterial-sphere).

The word *vipassanā* is often translated as insight. Technically, it is explained in Pāli as *aniccādivasena vividhākhārena passatīti vipassanā*.

aniccānupassanādikā bhāvanā paññā. (Seeing things or phenomena in different ways as impermanent (*anicca*) etc. *Vipassanā* here refers to meditative wisdom).²⁷⁷ *Vipassanā* (insight) meditation is the direct meditative approach to phenomena which is directly linked to the three characteristics: *anicca* (impermanence), *dukkha* (unsatisfactoriness or suffering), and *anatta* (non-self or insubstantiality). According to the *Abhidhamma*, insight wisdom is a function of *paññā* (wisdom) which is one of the fifty-two types of *cetasikas* (mental states). Its essential function is to direct the mind towards uncovering the true nature of things.

What is the difference between *samatha* meditation and *vipassanā* meditation? In the texts, the specific definition for *samatha* meditation is the following: *kāmacchandādayo paccanīka-dhamme sameti vināsettiti samatho. samādhissetaṃ nāmaṃ* (the function of *samatha* meditation is to tranquilize or settle down one's restless mind. *Samatha* here refers to *samādhi* [meditative concentration]). The various manifestations of mind such as sensual thoughts, thoughts of ill will, or skeptical thoughts (hindrances) are tranquilized during the practice. In this context, *samatha* is synonymous with *samādhi*. For the word "*vipassanā*", the definition is this: *aniccatādivasena vividhehi ākārehi dhamme passatīti vipassanā. paññāyetaṃ nāmaṃ*; (the function of *vipassanā* is to see the *dhamma* [things or phenomena] as they truly are in diverse ways, in relation to *anicca* [impermanence], *dukkha* [suffering or unsatisfactoriness], and *anatta*

[non-self or insubstantiality)). In this context, *vipassanā* is synonymous with *paññā* (wisdom). Thus it is understood that *vipassanā-ñāṇa* (insight knowledge) is the function of wisdom that appears as *paññā* (wisdom) in the *Abhidhamma*.²⁷⁸

One fundamental meditation technique to develop concentration is awareness of the in-and-out-breath. In this method the breath is the object of mindfulness. During the practice one should keep aware of the breath at the most obvious place it touches, either the upper lip or around the nostrils. As one pays attention to the breath in this way, one will be able to develop concentration. If one is unable to concentrate on the object in the very beginning, the *Visuddhimagga* suggests that one may count breaths or enumerate the breaths. The counting method may help one develop concentration comfortably. The counting method in the practice is known as "*gaṇana-naya*" (counting method). One can apply the method after the end of each breath like this: "The in-breath and the out-breath -- one, the in-breath and the out-breath -- two etc. In the *Visuddhimagga* Buddhaghosa clarifies this:

Herein, this clansman who is a beginner should first give attention to this meditation subject by counting. And when counting, he should not stop short of five or go beyond ten or make any break in the series. By stopping short of five his thoughts get excited in the cramped space, like a herd of cattle shut in a cramped pen. By going beyond ten his thoughts take the number [rather than the breaths] for their support. By making a break in the series he wonders if the meditation subject has reached completion or not. So he should do his counting without those faults.²⁷⁹

The Attainment of *Jhāna* Through *Ānāpāna* Meditation

The word, “*jhāna*” in Pāli, “*dhyāna*” in Sanskrit is a technical term for “absorption,” a deeper level of concentration. *Jhāna* is synonymous with the word “*appanā-samādhi*” (absorption concentration). During the practice of meditation, one must develop concentration together with the attainment of spiritual balance of these five controlling faculties: *saddhā* (faith) and *paññā* (wisdom), *vīriya* (effort) and *samādhi* (concentration), and continuity of *sati* (mindfulness).²⁸⁰ Then the concentration level of the meditator will go beyond the level of *upacāra-samādhi* (access concentration) and reach up to *appanā-samādhi* (absorption concentration). In the *Visuddhimagga*, there are two types of concentration that take place during the process of *jhāna*. As a matter of fact, one can attain the *jhāna* states applying several kinds of meditative methods. The following statements show some guidelines for Buddhist *jhāna* meditation. The statement reads as follows:

*samādhīti upacāra-appanāvasena duvidho. duvidhakotthāse channam anussatiṭṭhānānam maraṇassatiyā upasamānussatiyā āhāre paṭikūlasaññāya catudhātuvavatthānassaāti imesam vasena laddhacittekkaggatā. yā ca appanāsamādhīnam pabbabhāge ekaggatā. ayaṃ upacārasamādhī. "paṭmassa jhānassa parikammaṃ paṭamassa jhānassa anantarapaccayena paccayo" ti. ādivacanato pana yā parikammānantarā ekaggatā. ayaṃ appanāsamādhīti evaṃ upacārappanāvasena duvidho.*²⁸¹

In this section dealing with *samatha* concentration there are two kinds of concentration. Access concentration is the unification of mind obtained by the following, that is to say, the six recollections, mindfulness of death, the recollection of peace, the perception of repulsiveness in nutriment, and the defining of the four elements, and it is the unification

that precedes absorption concentration. Absorption concentration is the unification that follows immediately upon the preliminary-work (Ch, IV, 74) because of the words "The first *jhāna* preliminary-work is a condition, as proximity condition, for the first *jhāna*" (Pṭn 2, 350, Siamese ed.) So it is of two kinds as access and absorption.²⁸²

When one has reached the state of *jhāna* in this way, one's mind will know the *paṭibhāga-nimitta* (counterpart sign) without interruption. In terms of *nimitta*, there are three kinds of *nimitta* (signs): (1) *parikkamma-nimitta* (preliminary sign), (2) *uggaha-nimitta* (learning sign), and *paṭibhāga-nimitta* (counterpart sign) mentioned in the *Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha*.

*Nimmittesu pana parikammanimittam uggahanimittam sabbatthāpi yathāraham pariyāyeveva labbanteva. Paṭibhāganimittam pana kasināsubha-koṭṭharsa-āṇāpānesveva labbhati. tattha hi paṭibhāganimittamārabbha upacārasamādhī, appanāsamādhī ca pavattanti.*²⁸³

Of the three signs, the first two are generally found in relation to every object, in the appropriate way. But the counterpart sign is found only in the *kasīnas*, foulness, the parts of the body, and mindfulness of breathing. It is by means of the counterpart sign that access concentration and absorption concentration occur. When a beginner apprehends a particular sign for the earth disk, etc., that object is called the preliminary sign (*parikkamma-nimitta*), and that meditation is called preliminary development (*parikkamma-bhāvanā*).²⁸⁴

In the state of *jhāna*, according to Pa-Auk Sayādaw, one reaches the state of *parikkamma-nimitta* without interruption. "This can continue for several hours, even all night, or for a whole day."²⁸⁵ When one's mind stays continuously on the *parikkamma-nimitta*, one should try to discern the five *jhāna* factors, one at a time. The five *jhāna* factors are: (1) *vitakka* (initial application), *vicāra* (sustained application), *pīti* (joy), *sukha* (happiness), and *ekaggatā* (one-

pointedness). Eventually with continued practice, one will be able to discern them all together at once. The *jhāna* practitioner will discern in detail the *jhāna* factors as follows:

- (1) Applied thought (*vitakka*) -- directing and placing the mind on the *paṭibhāga-nimitta*.
- (2) Sustained thought (*vicāra*) -- maintaining the mind on the *paṭibhāga-nimitta*.
- (3) Joy (*pīti*) -- liking for the *paṭibhāga-nimitta*.
- (4) Bliss (*sukha*) -- pleasant feeling or happiness associated with experiencing the *paṭibhāga-nimitta*.
- (5) One-pointness (*ekaggatā*) -- one-pointedness of mind on the *paṭibhāga-nimitta*.²⁸⁶

In *jhāna* meditation, each of the individual *jhāna* factors is called *jhānaṅga* (*jhāna* factor). Yet when taken as a group, the factors are called *jhāna*. There are eight levels of *jhāna*. If one is just beginning to practice *jhāna*, one should enter the state of *jhāna* for a long time, but one should not spend too much time trying to discern the *jhāna* factors, until one gets mastery of the state of *jhāna*. According to the *Visuddhimagga*, one should acquire mastery in five ways, beginning with mastery of the first *jhāna*. There are five kinds of mastery needed in the state of *jhāna* (*vasībhāva*). They are:

- (1) *Āvajjanavasī* (mastery in advertizing) -- that is the ability to discern the *jhāna* factors immediately after emerging from *jhāna*.
- (2) *Samāpajjanavasī* (mastery in attaining) -- that is the ability to enter *jhāna* when one wishes to be in the *jhāna*.
- (3) *Adhiṭṭhānavasī* (mastery in resolving) -- that is the ability to remain in *jhāna* for as long as one has determined to be in the *jhāna*.
- (4) *Vuṭṭhānavasī* (mastery in emerging) -- that is the ability to leave the *jhāna* at the time one determines or to emerge from it at will, and
- (5) *Paccavekkhaṇāvasī* (mastery in reviewing) -- that is the ability to quickly discern the *jhāna* factors in order to re-enter the *jhāna*.²⁸⁷

In the *Pabbateyyagāvī Sutta*, An-N, the Buddha explains that if one attempts to enter the second *jhāna* without mastering the first *jhāna*, one will not only not attain the first *jhāna*, but also one is unable to attain the second *jhāna*. As a result, one will miss both *jhānas*. Therefore, one should have the aforementioned five masteries before going to higher *jhānas*. When a meditator has reached the fourth *jhāna* by means of mindfulness of breathing, he or she has fully developed the five masteries. At that level of *jhāna* meditation, one's concentration is so deep and so steady that one can move on to develop *vipassanā* meditation in order to attain path and fruition knowledge or enlightenment (*magga-phala-ñāṇa*). In path and fruition knowledge one is able to experience the peaceful and blissful state of *Nibbāna*.²⁸⁸ However, if one does not wish to practice *vipassanā* meditation at that time, one may continue to practice *samatha* meditation so as to develop the higher levels of *jhāna*, that is, *rūpa-jhāna* (fine-material-absorption) and *arūpa-jhāna* (immaterial-absorption).

The Attainment of Wisdom (*Ñāṇa*) Through Insight Meditation

As has been mentioned, there are two fundamental methods, also called "*yānika*" (vehicle). One is *samatha-yānika* (one who has tranquility as vehicle) and the other is *vipassanā-yānika* (one who has insight as vehicle). Those practicing *vipassanā* meditation without attaining the level of *samatha-jhāna* (absorptions) are known as *sukkha-vipassaka-yānika* or *suddha-vipassanā-yānika*

(one who supports his practice with bare insight as vehicle).²⁸⁹ Those who teach the method of *samatha-yānika* base their instruction on the commentary statement in the text. The statement reads as follows:

*Tāni vā pana jhānāni samāpajjitvā vuṭṭhāya jhānasampayuttam cittaṃ khayato vayato sampassato vipassanākkhaṇe lakkhaṇapaṭivedhena upajjati khaṇikacittekaggatā.*²⁹⁰

Alternatively, when, having entered upon those *jhānas* and emerged from them, he comprehends with insight the consciousness associated with the *jhānas* as liable to destruction and to fall, then at the actual time of insight momentary unification of the mind arises through the penetration of the characteristics [of impermanence, and so on].²⁹¹

However, those who prefer to teach the method of *sukha-vipassaka-yānika* base their instruction on the sub-commentary statement of the text. The statement reads as follows:

*Khaṇikacittekaggatāti khaṇamattaṭṭhitiko samādhī. sopi hi ārammaṇe tīrantaraṃ ekākāreṇa pavattamāno paṭipakkhena anabhibhūto appito viya cittaṃ niccalaṃ ṭhpeti.*²⁹²

Khaṇika-samādhī means concentration, which penetrates into the objects from moment to moment. Such kind of concentration is able to destroy the hindrances (sensual thoughts and thoughts of ill will etc.), so that the mind is unshakably upon the object and rests upon the object from moment to moment.²⁹³

By practicing insight meditation, one realizes the path and fruition knowledge. Since one has fully attained the path and fruition knowledge through *vipassanā* meditation, he or she is considered an enlightened being in Theravāda Buddhism. In the present age, Buddhists in Burma (Myanmar) mostly practice *vipassanā* meditation without developing *samatha jhāna*. However, some

meditators do start their practice with the development of *jhāna* before switching to *vipassanā* meditation.

Most Burmese meditation masters state that *khaṇikā-samādhi* (momentary concentration) has the function of concentration in that it removes mental distractions from the mind and eradicates adverse things, known as *nīvaraṇa* (hindrances) at each moment of awareness. This kind of mental state that temporarily keeps hindrances away from one's mind is able to attain insight as well as path and fruition knowledge. Yet Pa-Auk Sayadāw who is a well-known meditation master in Burma prefers to start his instructions with the development of *jhāna* meditation.

In this regard, the function of concentration is to reduce *nīvaraṇa* (hindrances) from one's mind so as to purify the mind. The *nīvaraṇa* consists of the five factors that are obstacles to the mind and blind one's mental vision (spiritual wisdom). The five factors of *nīvaraṇa* are: (1) *kāmacchanda-nīvaraṇa* (sensuous desire), (2) *vyāpāda-nīvaraṇa* (ill will), *thina-middha-nīvaraṇa* (sloth and torpor), *uddhacca-kukkucca-nīvaraṇa* (restlessness and remorse), and *vicikicchā-nīvaraṇa* (sceptical doubt).²⁹⁴ Those who follow the path of *samatha* (*jhāna*) meditation proclaim that in the presence of the *nīvaraṇa* one cannot reach *upacāra-samādhi* (neighbourhood or access concentration) and *appanā-samādhi* (absorption or full concentration). Yogis following the path of *vipassanā-meditation* state that in the presence of the *nīvaraṇa*, one cannot

clearly discern the truths. Those truths include *nāma-rūpa* (mind and matter), which are related to the three universal characteristics: *anicca* (impermanency), *dukkha* (suffering), and *anatta* (non-self or the impersonal and insubstantial nature of all corporeal and mental phenomena of existence).²⁹⁵

Vipassanā (insight) meditation is also linked to the "Four Foundations of Mindfulness Meditation" in Buddhist practice. Those who practice the "Four Foundations of Mindfulness Meditation" are considered to be practicing *Vipassanā* meditation.²⁹⁶ The mindfulness meditation provides seven benefits to those who practice it. The seven benefits are: (1) purification of beings (*suddhivā*), (2) and (3) overcoming of sorrow and distress (*sokaparidevānaṃ samatikkamāya*), (4) and (5) disappearance of pain (physical and sadness (mental pain) (*dukkha-domanassānaṃ atthaṅgamāya*), (6) of the right path (*ñāyassa adhigamāya*), and realization of *Nibbāna* (*Nibbāna sacchikiriya*). When one considers how wonderful it would be to overcome sorrow and distress and to cause the disappearance of the mental and sadness associated with the pain of the body as well as purely mental sadness, these are very encouraging for those meditators who seek the path of *Nibbāna*. In the *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, the Buddha clearly addresses

*Āyano ayaṃ bhikkhave maggo sattānaṃ visuddhiyā sokaparidevānaṃ samatikkamāya dukkhadomanassānaṃ atthaṅgamāya ñāyassa adhigamāya Nibbāna sacchikiriya, yadidaṃ cattāro satipaṭṭhānā.*²⁹⁷

There is, monks, this one way to the purification of beings, for the overcoming of sorrow and distress, for the disappearance of pain and sadness, for the gaining of the highest path, for the realization of *Nibbāna*: - that is to say the "Four Foundations of Mindfulness."²⁹⁸

In Buddhist writings, the word "*vipassanā-ñāṇa*" very often appears in relation to Buddhist meditation. Therefore, one might pose the question: "What is *vipassanā-ñāṇa* (insight-wisdom)?" Insight-wisdom is the intuitive sense or experience that is able to realize the truth of impermanency (*aniccānupassanā-ñāṇa*), of suffering (*dukkhānupassanā-ñāṇa*), of impersonality or in other words the insubstantial nature of physical and mental phenomena of existence (*anattānupassanā-ñāṇa*). According to Buddhist perspective, insight wisdom is not the result of mere intellectual understanding, but it is a kind of realization that links to direct meditative observation of one's own physical and mental process. The initial observation of the physical and mental phenomena with insight wisdom can lead one to attain *Nibbāna*.²⁹⁹ In this theoretical context, Buddhists point out the fact that since the experience of *Nibbāna* is pertinent to meditative practice, it is impossible to understand *Nibbānic* nature merely through intellectual speculation. "*Realization of Nibbāna*" refers to realization of the process of path and fruition knowledge (*magga-phala-ñāṇa*). That process is accomplished through supramundane wisdom at attainment of full enlightenment. The "*experience of Nibbāna*" has the function of discovery. For the true essence of *Nibbāna* arises with the attainment of the state of absolute

peace; at that time, one experiences seeing the process of all phenomena that have totally ceased and absolute peace comes to exist.

It is impossible for those who haven't undertaken meditative practice to understand the true experience of *Nibbāna*. It is argued that based on the theoretical aspect, the word *Nibbāna* is indeed vague and hard to understand. Thus some non-meditative practitioners like Robert L. Slater interpret the word "*Nibbāna*" differently; "It (*Nibbāna*) belongs to the language of faith. The negative terms employed are just as much an affirmation of this faith as the associated picture-terms of analogy which are more obviously positive."³⁰⁰ But the Buddha repeatedly expressed that it is impossible to understand the essence of *Nibbānic* nature merely through intellectual speculation. It can only be fully understood by the attainment of enlightenment.

Buddhism describes its systematic approach practically as well as theoretically. The following step is a preparatory stage for *vipassanā* (insight) wisdom. If one sincerely desires to develop insight wisdom in the present life, one should give up worldly thoughts and actions during the meditation training. Since this practice is for the purification of conduct (*sīla-visuddhi*), it is essential to observe precepts either five precepts³⁰¹ or eight precepts initially.³⁰² As an additional regulation, one is not to speak to other yogis (meditators) and visitors during the meditation training. This Buddhist action is known as "Noble Silence (*tuphībhāva*)."³⁰³ For the Buddhists, there are some additional preparatory actions,

such as asking for forgiveness from the Noble Ones as well as the meditation teachers, if one has offended them before the training. Moreover, one should generate *caturārakkha-bhāvanā* (the "Four Protections of mental development"). They are: (1) reflection on the virtue of the Buddha (*Buddhānussati-bhāvanā*), (2) generating loving-thoughts towards all beings (*Mettā-bhāvanā*), (3) reflection on the loathsomeness of the body (*asubha-bhāvanā*), and (4) reflection on nature of death (*marañānussati-bhāvanā*).³⁰³

According to Mahāsi Sayādaw, to begin the *vīpassanā* meditation training in the appropriate way, one should start sitting meditation with a comfortable posture. One should give up worldly thoughts, staying in the present moment, and keep one's mind on the object, such as in and out breath (*ānāpāna*), or the object of the abdomen, that is, the movement of rising and falling and so on. After a short time, one will come to know the movements of rising and falling obviously through awareness. One's mental noting or mental awareness of each movement of the abdomen helps one perceive the process of *nāma-rūpa*, that is, the bodily sensation and mental awareness of the object so as to develop one's spiritual ability in the practice. One is able to know each successive occurrence of the mental and physical processes at each of the six senses organs when insight contemplation is fully developed. As one makes progress in mindfulness meditation, one can distinguish the differences between true nature of mind and body; between pleasant and unpleasant sensation, and between wholesome and

unwholesome mental factors including greed, hatred and delusion. Thus one will realize the aim of practicing *vipassanā* (insight) meditation, that is, to release one's mind from greed, hatred and delusion which are the roots of all evil and suffering of human beings.³⁰⁴

As has been mentioned, meditators use these three types of concentration in different parts of the training. For instance, (1) *upacāra samādhi* (neighbourhood or access concentration) is a kind of concentration which emerges during *samatha meditation* and which takes place just before entering any of the *jhāna* (absorption) states. However, (2) *appanā samādhi* (absorption or full concentration) is a kind of concentration that exists while one is in the state of *jhāna*. Meditators who practice *vipassanā* meditation mainly apply *khaṇika samādhi* (momentary concentration) to *vipassanā* meditation. The method of *khaṇika samādhi* takes a step toward mental purification by overcoming greed, hatred and delusion from moment to moment. This method of meditation is employed to attain the realization of *Nibbāna*.³⁰⁵

Regarding the progress of insight in *vipassanā* practice, there are some divergent perspectives contained in the Buddhist commentaries. In the *Visuddhimagga*, the commentators mention the progress of insight knowledge starting with *nāmarūpa-paticcheda-ñāṇa* (analytical knowledge of mind and body), *paccayaparigaha-ñāṇa* (knowledge of discerning cause and condition) and then *sammasana-ñāṇa* (knowledge of comprehension), etc., while in the

Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha, the commentator mentions that the progress of insight wisdom starts with *sammasana-ñāṇa* (knowledge of comprehension).³⁰⁶

According to Mahāsi Sayādaw, a meditator who wants to attain *Nibbāna* in this very life should base the practice on the foundation of the "Noble Eightfold Path" taught by the Buddha in the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*, the *Mahāsatiphaṭṭhana Sutta*, and in some other *Suttas*. This path consists of the eight factors (Right View, Right Understanding, Right Action, Right Speech, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration). These constituents of the path lead one to the realization of the cessation of suffering, that is, *Nibbāna*.

The sequence in developing insight-wisdom is given, in the *Visuddhimagga*. That sequence is as follows: (1) *nāma-rūpa-pariggaha-ñāṇa* (analytical knowledge of mind and body), (2) *paccayapariggaha-ñāṇa* (knowledge of discerning cause and condition), (3) *sammasana-ñāṇa* (knowledge of comprehension), (4) *udayabhaya-ñāṇa* (knowledge of rise and fall of formations), (5) *bhanga-ñāṇa* (knowledge of the dissolution of formations), (6) *bhaya-ñāṇa* (knowledge of dissolving things as fearful), (7) *ādīnava-ñāṇa* (knowledge of fearful things as dangerous), (8) *nibbidā-ñāṇa* (knowledge of disenchantment with formations), (9) *muñcitikamyatā-ñāṇa* (knowledge of desire for deliverance), (10) *paṭisankhā-ñāṇa* (knowledge of reflecting contemplation), (11) *saṅkhārupekhā-ñāṇa* (knowledge of equanimity towards formations), (12)

anuloma-ñāṇa (knowledge of conformity), (13) *vuṭṭhānagāminī-vīpassanā-ñāṇa* (knowledge leading to Emergence), (14) *gotrabhu-ñāṇa* (knowledge of maturity), (15) *magga-ñāṇa* (knowledge of Path), and (16) *phala-ñāṇa* (knowledge of Fruition).³⁰⁷

In this context of the progress of insight wisdom, Mahāsi Sayādaw points out the spiritual process and how to get into the state of the realization of *Nibbāna* through the path. He provides the following statement.

According to the *Visuddhi Magga*, the "insight Leading to Emergence" is the culmination of Insight, and is identical with the following three knowledges; Equanimity about Formations, Desire for Deliverance, and Knowledge of Reobservation. It is called "Leading to Emergence" because it emerges from the contemplation of formations (conditioned phenomena) to the Supramundane Path that has *Nibbāna* as its object. That means that *Nibbāna* has now become an object of direct experience, and is no longer a mental construct of conceptual thinking.³⁰⁸

Although these stages of insight wisdom are the entire way of mindfulness meditation progressing up to its culmination, the emphasis of the progress is on the advanced stages of the path with the distinctive feature of meditators being their clarity of insight. Those who have not participated in the practice personally may not understand the significance of the stages of insight wisdom. As a matter of fact, these experiences are illustrated by the actual meditative practice. Therefore, philosophical thinking about insight wisdom may not grant great clarity in this sense. It is indeed good to examine insight wisdom through philosophical thinking, but the best way to examine insight wisdom is to

make the effort to practice in order to see this insight wisdom for oneself directly. Practice is the only means of reaching or achieving the Buddhist goal, *Nibbāna*.

Seven Stages of *Visuddhi* in Insight Meditation

In Theravāda Buddhist meditation, developing *vipassanā-ñāṇa* (insight wisdom) and developing *visuddhi* (purification) are considered to be the same approach in practice. It is applying the same method, but using different terminology. They are intertwined in the path of practical progress. In this regard, to develop the seven stages of *visuddhi* (purification) a meditator must first develop *sīla-visuddhi* (purification of virtue). It is directly stated that the meditator must first observe either the eight precepts or the five precepts. Meanwhile, the meditator must follow the procedure of the "Four Foundations of Mindfulness" meditation, which contains four aspects. They are: (1) contemplating body as body (*kāyānupassanā-satipaṭṭhāna*), (2) contemplating feeling as feeling (*vedanānupassanā-satipaṭṭhāna*), (3) contemplating mind as mind (*cittānupassanā-satipaṭṭhāna*), and (4) contemplating *dharmma*-object as *dharmma*-object (*dharmmānupassanā-satipaṭṭhāna*).³⁰⁹ Consequently, the meditator is able to obtain *citta-visuddhi* (purification of mind) eradicating the five hindrances (*nīvaraṇas*).

However, for monks (*bhikkhus*) purification of virtue (*sīla*) respectively consists of the four kinds of virtues. They are: (1) virtue that one restrains oneself from unwholesome actions and speech according to the monastic rules (*pātimokkha-saṁvara-sīla*), (2) virtue with regards to restraint of the sense faculties (*indriya-saṁvara-sīla*), (3) virtue with regards to purity of livelihood (*ājīvapārisuddhi-sīla*), and (4) virtue that is connected with the use of the requisites (*paccayasannissita-sīla*).³¹⁰ These four types of virtues are explained especially with reference to the monastic life of a monk (*bhikkhu*) and also known as *catu-pārisuddhi-sīla* (purification of virtues).

In this context, the monastic rules contain two hundred and twenty-seven (227) concerning different kind of actions. These monastic rules were laid down by the Buddha. In order to strengthen the virtue of the faculties a monk is to be aware of objects mindfully in his encounter with sense objects, or faculties, such as eye base, or eye faculty (*indriya*), nose faculty, tongue faculty, and body faculty. Thus one can fulfill the virtue of the sense faculties by purifying the mind. The purity of livelihood for monks deals with the proper manner in which a monk acquires the necessities of life in accordance with monastic rules. And the virtue, which is connected with the use of the four requisites (almsfood, lodging, robes, and medicines), is to use them after reflecting upon their proper purpose. For instance, "I will use these requisites for the sake of the spiritually healthy living in order to carry on *sāsaṇa* (dispensation of the Buddha) duties,

such as *pariyatti* (to study doctrines) and *paṭipatti* (to practice meditation in accordance with the doctrinal theories).³¹¹ When monks are performing monastic duties, they do their work mindfully. As a result, the monks are able to obtain *citta-visuddhi* (purification of mind), eradicating the five hindrances.

In the progress of the path of purification, the first two kinds of purification are very important for further development. Without having developed these two, the progress of purification seems to be impossible. The third stage of purification is *diṭṭhi-visuddhi* (purification of view). When the yogi reaches the attainment level of *diṭṭhi-visuddhi*, the meditator's mind can understand the reality of mind and corporeality, having overcome all false beliefs in oneself. Before the attainment of *diṭṭhi-visuddhi*, most meditators think that *atta* (soul) exists in their body as a personal and eternal entity. After achieving the *diṭṭhi-visuddhi*, one can develop wisdom that is able to see just mind and corporeality in the five aggregates. Seeing this reality, in this case, seeing the phenomena as *nāma-rūpa* (mind and body), meditators deny the concept of *atta* (soul) and the view of "soul theory" which is related to the Hindu theory of *Atman* (Supreme Soul). In this regard, seeing no soul for Buddhism is the right view and is an essential component of the state of purification.

In fact, *Citta-visuddhi* (the purification of mind) has a similar function with *samādhī* (concentration), which overcomes mental disturbances and mental

distractions. So purification of mind or concentration is essential to obtaining the complete development of purification. In the *Samādhi Sutta*, as mentioned previously, the Buddha addressed this matter: *Samādhim bhikkhave bhāvētha, samāhito bhikkhave bhikkhū yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti* (Bhikkhus, develop concentration. A bhikkhu who is concentrated is one who understands things as they really are). In Buddhist meditation, seeing a thing as it really is, in its originality, without being influenced by hallucination (*vipallāsa*) is known as *yathābhūta-ñāṇa* (the knowledge which is according to reality).³¹² The sequence of development of the higher levels of purification is provided in the *Visuddhimagga* as follows: (1) *sīla-visuddhi* (purification of virtue), (2) *citta-visuddhi* (purification of mind), (3) *diṭṭhi-visuddhi* (purification of view), (4) *kaṅkhāvitarāṇa-visuddhi* (purification by overcoming doubt), (5) *maggāmaggañāṇadassana-visuddhi* (purification by knowledge and vision as to what is the path and what is not the path), (6) *paṭipadāñāṇadassana-visuddhi* (purification by knowledge and vision of the way, and (7) *ñāṇadassana-visuddhi* (purification by knowledge and vision).³¹³

Though there are seven stages of purification in the process of mindfulness meditation, these are, after all, under the categories of the three training bases: *sīla* (virtue), *samādhi* (concentration), and *paññā* (wisdom). Seeing this consistency of the meditation method, Buddhists proclaim these meditation methods as the way to *Nibbāna*. The Buddhist Pāḷi scholar, Bhikkhu

Bodhi who is the editor of *A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma*, points this out in the following statement. These seven stages of purification are to be attained in sequence, each being the support for the one that follows. The first purification corresponds to the morality aspect of the path, the second to the concentration aspect, the last five to the wisdom aspect. The first six stages are mundane, the last is the supramundane paths.³¹⁴

Table 5. The Seven Stages of Purification and Sixteen Stages of Insight Wisdom

Purification	Insight Knowledge
I. Purification of (<i>sīla</i>) virtue	*Initially taking 5 or 8 precepts before practice
II. Purification of mind	*Access and absorption (momentary) concentration
III. Purification of view	1. Analytical knowledge of mind and body
IV. Purif. by overcoming doubt	2. Knowledge of discerning cause and effect condition
V. Purif. by knowledge and vision of path and not path	3. Knowledge of comprehension
VI. Purif. by knowledge and vision of the way	4. Knowledge of rise and fall (tender phase)
	4. Knowledge of rise and fall (mature phase)
	5. Knowledge of dissolution
	6. Knowledge of fearfulness
	7. Knowledge of danger
	8. Knowledge of disenchantment
	9. Knowledge of desire for deliverance
	10. Knowledge of reflection
	11. Knowledge of equanimity toward formations
	12. Knowledge of conformity
	13. Knowledge of emergence
	14. Knowledge of maturity
VII. Purif. by knowledge and vision	15. Knowledge of Path (supramundane path)
	16. Knowledge of Fruition (supramundane fruition)

NOTE: The above statement of purification and insight knowledge is based on the book *The Progress of Insight* authored by Mahāsi Sayādaw in Burma. In the chart, the first two *visuddhis* are preliminary practice for further development of insight.³¹⁵

Seeing the systematic progress of the stages of purification as well as insight wisdom including path and fruition knowledge, meditation masters apply the techniques to the practice of meditation with their own interpretations based on the teaching of the Buddha. Mahāsi Sayādaw, who was a great meditation master in Burma, stated that it was sufficient enough to develop the stages of insight wisdom through *khaṇikā-samādhi* (momentary concentration) in order to be able to realize what is *Nibbāna*. Pa-Auk Sayādaw, who is also well-known as a meditation teacher in Burma emphasizes that a meditator should develop *samatha jhāna* together with *upācāra-samādhi* (access concentration) and *appanā-samādhi* (absorption concentration) first and then develop insight wisdom to realize what is *Nibbāna*.³¹⁶

The Final Realization of *Nibbāna*

In terms of the realization of *Nibbāna*, Buddhists bring up an abundance of positive and direct affirmations supporting the view of the attainment of *Nibbāna* based on practice. Yet the emphatic language that they use is still negative, such as absolute cessation (*āsavakkhaya*), no birth (*ajāta*) and no death (*amata*). Therefore, the Buddha emphasized *sammā-dīṭṭhi* (right understanding).

It takes an important and crucial role in the spiritual path. Right understanding involves insight wisdom that sees things truly as they exist. Otherwise, one's mind may link to four kinds of *vipallāsa* (hallucinations, or perversions). They occur in one's mind due to perversion of perception (*saññā-vipallāsa*), or perversion of consciousness (*citta-vipallāsa*), or perversion of view (*diṭṭhi-vipallāsa*). All of these are able to hinder the progress of one's meditation. What are the four hallucinations? (1) One regards what is impermanent (*anicca*) as permanent (*nicca*), (2) what is painful (*dukkha*) as pleasant (*sukha*), (3) what is without a self or soul (*anatta*) as a self or soul (*atta*) (4) what is impure (*asubha*) as pure or beautiful (*subha*).³¹⁷ These four kinds of hallucinations take place in one's mind, because of having no right understanding about reality. Some people presume that understanding theories and views is right understanding or perfect realization, but it is not true. Perfect realization is not based on any theoretical mode or code of discipline, but one's own practical insight knowledge. Therefore, practice is necessary for right understanding (*sammā-diṭṭhi*), and perfect realization directly refers to enlightenment in Buddhism.³¹⁸ Regarding the issue of perfect realization, Venerable Taungpulu Kabā-Aye Sayādaw addressed the matter thus:

There are three kinds of knowledge discerning mind-and-matter, namely:
 (1) *Sutumaya-ñāṇa* -- knowledge acquired through auditing or learning.
 (2) *Cintāma-ñāṇa* -- knowledge acquired through speculation. (3)
Bhāvanāmayā-ñāṇa -- knowledge acquired through developmental practices or insight meditation. Of these three, realization of mind-and-

matter through the knowledge of hearing or through the knowledge of speculation is not bona fide knowledge. Realization of mind-and matter only through developmental practices or insight contemplation is said to be a perfect realization.³¹⁹

From the point of view of the Path, realization initially refers to *sammā-diṭṭhi* (right understanding). The Buddha emphasizes how important right understanding is for liberation. In the *Paṭhama-dārukkhandhopama Sutta*, the Buddha addressed the matter in the following statement, providing an analogy of a great log being carried along by the current of the river Ganges. The Buddha continued with this statement:

If, bhikkhu, that log does not veer towards the near shore, does not veer towards the far shore, does not sink in mid-stream, does not get cast up on high ground, does not get caught by human beings, does not get caught by non-human beings, does not get caught in a whirlpool, and does not become inwardly rotten, it will slant, slope, and incline towards the ocean. For what reason? Because the current of the river Ganges slants, slopes, and inclines towards the ocean. So too, bhikkhus, if you do not veer towards the near shore (the designation for the six internal sense bases), do not veer towards the far shore (the designation for the six external sense bases), do not sink in mid-stream (the designation for desire and lust), do not get cast up on high ground (the designation for the conceit, "I am"), do not get caught by human beings (the association with people), do not get caught by non-human beings (the aspiration to be reborn in devas' world), do not get caught in a whirlpool (the designation for the five sensual pleasures), and do not become inwardly rotten (having immoral and evil character), you will slant, slope, and incline towards *Nibbāna*. For what reason? Because right view (right understanding) slants, slopes, and inclines towards *Nibbāna*.³²⁰

As matter of fact, *sammā-diṭṭhi* (right understanding) and *sammā-sati* (right mindfulness) are essential for the realization of *Nibbāna*. Basically, they make one's insight mature. Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw responded with this

statement. When the meditator continues to observe mindfully on the object of *nāma-rūpa* (mind and body), his or her insight grows steadily and shows its intrinsic nature in clarity. The meditator comes to perceive more distinctly the arising and passing away of the process of mind and body; the meditator knows each object that arises at the moment and disappears immediately and the meditator realizes that the previous occurrence is one thing and the succeeding occurrence is another. Thus his or her right understanding can attain insight wisdom which is able to lead one to realize *Nibbāna*.³²¹

In this study a critical question arises. Is it possible that everyone who practices meditation can attain *Nibbāna* in this very life? In this regard, Buddhism provides an exceptional answer for this question. One must make a great effort in the practice of this meditation. Otherwise the practice may be discouraging to the meditator, especially when one sees no progress in the practice. Skepticism or doubt about the practice will arise. For this reason, one needs to understand whether or not one's *pāramī* (spiritual perfection) is mature. That is important as well. And even if one's *pāramī* is mature enough, without effort one cannot attain *Nibbāna* either. Therefore, one should make an effort to practice meditation vigorously and also to know whether or not one's *pāramī* is mature enough; then one can know whether or not one can attain enlightenment in this very life or in future lives.

In Theravāda Texts, moreover, the notion of enlightenment is emphasized as the eradication of *kilesas* (defilements) and liberation from *samsāric* sufferings. So long as one has not attained insight wisdom through meditation, one sees things in an illusory manner due to ignorance. *Vipassanā* meditation really helps one peel off layer after layer of ignorance until meditators can gain insight wisdom; at that time they realize the true nature of reality and attain enlightenment, entry into *Nibbāna*. According to the *Mahāli Sutta*, Di-N, there are four levels of enlightenment. The enlightenment levels are based upon enlightened individuals. Among the enlightened individuals, the first stage of enlightened being is a *Sotāpanna* individual (*Thotāpan* in Burmese). A Stream-Enterer (Stream-Winner) has cut off the three *saṃyojanas* (fetters): false view (*dīṭṭhi-saṃyojana*), skeptical doubt (*vicikicchā-saṃyojana*), and adherence to rules and rituals (*sīlabbataparāmāsa-saṃyojana*).³²² "According to the commentaries, he also cuts off envy (*issā-saṃyojana*) and avarice (*micchariya-saṃyojana*). He has freed himself as well from all degrees of defilements strong enough to lead to rebirth in the woeful planes."³²³ In addition, he has unshakable confidence or belief in the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha, and unbrokened *sīla* (the five precepts) with the scrupulous attitude in morality; he is free from the rebirth in any of the four woeful realms (*apāya*) and he will not be reborn more than seven times in the human world and celestial worlds.³²⁴

The second stage of enlightened being is a *Sakadāgāmi* individual (*Thakadāgam* in Burmese) -- A Once-Returner reduces his greed, hatred, and delusion and will return to the sensual-sphere world only one more time.³²⁵

The third stage of enlightened being is an *Anāgāmi* individual (*Thakadāgam* in Burmese) -- A Non-Returner has totally abandoned sensual lust (*kāmarāga-saṃyojana*) and ill will (*paṭigha-saṃyojana*) and he will not return to this sensuous world (human and celestial world). Regarding this level, in canonical texts such as in the *Mahāli Sutta*, Di-N Vol. I, it is stated that a Non-Returner has abandoned the five lower fetters (*orambhāgiya-saṃyojana*); he takes a spontaneous rebirth in a higher world (Brahma world) and he will attain enlightenment in that world. In this regard, the lower fetters refer to the following five-*saṃyojanas* (fetters). The power of these five lower fetters is able to yoke beings to the sensual world (*kāma-bhūmi*), the worlds of the *apāya*, the human world and the worlds of the lesser heavenly beings. The five fetters are: (1) sensual lust (*kāmarāga-saṃyojana*), (2) ill-will (*paṭigha-saṃyojana*), (3) adherence to rules and rituals (*sīlabbataparāmāsa-saṃyojana*), (4) false view (*diṭṭhi-saṃyojana*), and (5) skeptical doubt (*vicikicchā-saṃyojana*). Thus a Non-Returner will not be reborn in the sensual world, but will be reborn in the *Brahma*-world, also known as "*uddhambhāgiya-saṃyojana*" (higher world), due to the fact that the remaining five fetters (*saṃyojana*) have not been eradicated. These five fetters are (1) attachment to fine-material existence (*rūparāga-*

saṃyojana), (2) attachment to immaterial existence (*arūparāga-saṃyojana*), (3) conceit (*māna-saṃyojana*), (4) restlessness (*uddhacca-saṃyojana*), and (5) ignorance (*avijjā-saṃyojana*).³²⁶

The final stage of enlightened being is an *Arahant individual* (*Yahantar* in Burmese). The *Arahant* totally abandons all *saṃyojana* (fetters), all *kilesa* (defilements), and all *āsava* (cankers, taints) through the extinction of mental corruptions; he has realized by his own insight and path and fruition wisdom (enlightenment); and he will not be reborn in any existence. He enters the state of the absolute peace of *Nibbāna*. Thus, he is named as a "fully enlightened one."³²⁷

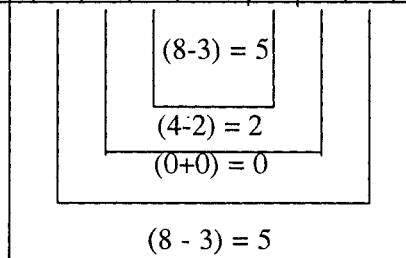
In this context, since the category of *Samyojana* (fetters) has two different types, this study provides a chart that one can see the statement regarding the fetters (*saṃyojana*) in order to visualize them clearly. Here it should be noted that the categories of *kilesas* (defilements) and *saṃyojanas* (fetters) more or less have the same basis in Buddhist texts, but appear in different usages occasionally. Although certain mental factors may combine differently into certain groups, all have their origin from among the fourteen unwholesome mental factors. For instance, *Thina* (sloth) has the same basis as *Middha* (torpor) and *Kukkucca* (remorse) has the same basis as *Dosa* (hatred). In this way it should be understood how the defilements (*kilesas*) and fetters (*saṃyojanas*) are linked to the fourteen unwholesome mental factors (*akusala*

cetasikas). The following is the chart of this relationship according to the

Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha.³²⁸

Table 6. Eradication of *Samyojanas* (Fetters) by the Paths

Fetters In Sutta Method	St.	O-r	N-r	Ar.	=	Ar	N-r	O-r	St.	Fetters in Abh. Method
Sensual Lust (Kā-S)			*		=		*			Sensual Lust (Kā-S)
Greed (Rū-S)				*	+	*				Greed (Exis.) (Bha-S)
Greed (Ar-S)				*	+				*	Envy (Issā-S)
Aversion (Paṭi-S)			*		=		*			Aversion (Paṭi-S)
Conceit (Māna-S)				*	=	*				Conceit (Māna-S).
Wrong-View (Di-S)	*				=				*	Wrong-View (W-S)
Adhe. to R/C (Sī-S)	*				=				*	Adhe. to R/C (Sī-S)
Doubt (Vici-S)	*				=				*	Doubt (Vici-S)
Restlessness (Udd-S)				*	+				*	Avarice (Macch-S)
Ignorance (Avi-S)				*	=	*				Ignorance (Avi-S)
Total	3	0	2	5	+	3	2	0	5	Total



Key Words: St. = Realizing the path of Stream entry or Stream-winner (*Sotāpanna*); O-r = Realizing the the path of Once-returner (*Sakadāgāmi*); N-r = Realizing the path of Non-returner (*Anāgāmi*); and Ar = Realizing the path of Arahant (*Arahanta*).

Kā-S = *Kāmarāga-saṃyojana*; Rū-S = *Rūparāga-saṃyojana*; Ar-S = *Arūparāga-saṃyojana*; Bha-S = *Bhavarāga-saṃyojana*; Pati-S = *Paṭigha-saṃyojana*; Māna-S = *Māna-saṃyojana*; Di-S = *Diṭṭhi-saṃyojana*; Issā-S = *Issā-saṃyojana*; Macch-S = *Macchariya-saṃyojana*; Udd-S = *Uddhacca-saṃyojana*; and Avi-S = *Avijjā-saṃyojana*.

Back to the statement of the Path to *Nibbāna*, according to Mahāsi Sayādaw, the "Path and Fruition Knowledge" have been connected to one another via the process of supramundane wisdom. He said,

Path Knowledge is the knowledge connected with the four Supramundane Paths of Stream-Entry, etc. Here, in this passage, only the Path of Stream-Entry is meant. Path Knowledge, like Maturity Knowledge, lasts only for one moment of consciousness, being followed by the Fruition Knowledge resulting from it, which may repeat itself many times and may also be deliberately entered into, by way of the 'Attainment of Fruition'.³²⁹

The functions of wisdom take place accordingly, until the supramundane Path and Fruition wisdom fully realize the state of *Nibbāna* as their object. That is not to say that *Nibbāna* is finally nothing, but that it goes beyond the mundane level that involves the process of rising and passing away of all phenomena. However, at the level of *Nibbāna* this kind of process completely stops and goes into the state of the absolute peace. With the cessation of that process the yogis have the experience of absolute transcendental peace (*lokuttara-dhamma*) and supramundane bliss (*santi-sukha*) in the state of *Nibbāna*. Thus the conclusion comes to this study that practicing rightly is our own spiritual work; the realization of *Nibbāna* will arise by means of wisdom. Venerable Nāgasena states in this regard as follows:

There is this element of *Nibbāna*, sire, peaceful, happy, and excellent. It is that which he who is practicing rightly, comprehending the formations in accordance with the instruction of the Conquerors, realizes by means of wisdom.³³⁰

Concluding Remarks

In terms of the interpretation of *Nibbāna*, this research has readjusted and promoted the former scholarly interpretations, which are indeed not sufficient enough to understand what the true meaning of *Nibbāna* is theoretically and philosophically. The reasons are the limitation of the language that they use; probably the writers who have insufficient practice purifying the mind are unable to realize what the nature of *Nibbāna* is and therefore they are unable to clarify what the meaning of *Nibbāna* is practically. In reality, *Nibbāna* can be expressed with a positive statement or a negative statement, depending on what one thinks. My premise is that there is no way to describe *Nibbāna* in positive terms only. Although *Nibbāna* is mostly described in negative terms, such as the absolute extinction, not becoming, and not rebirth, it does not mean that *Nibbāna* is negative.³³¹ That conclusion is indeed a positive statement.

The interpreters, however, may see this statement about *Nibbāna* as a negative statement and try to counter with what seem positive terms, using or emphasizing descriptions such as absolute happiness, peacefulness, transcendental serenity and blissfulness. Since the former interpreters cannot

reach the transcendental levels of *Nibbāna* through worldly language or by way of the philosophical context, they attempt to define it as a peaceful and blissful state like a paradise with transcendental light. However, one may not understand the true nature of *Nibbāna* through worldly concepts, but one may assume that it is a transcendental state, which exists in the nature of *dhamma*. *Dhamma* here means *lokuttara-citta* (supramundane consciousness), that is, the state of *dhamma-dhātu* (*dhamma*-element), which exists as a transcendental state known by enlightened beings.

One may say that *Nibbāna* is neither negative nor positive. This is because the nature of the *dhamma* is neither negative nor positive. The view of negative or positive is merely a worldly concept. Therefore, if one attempts to describe the word *Nibbāna* as a concept through a worldly language for the purpose of communication or philosophical appreciation, one may not reach the true essence of *Nibbāna*, since the true essence of *Nibbāna* goes beyond worldly language. Again, there are no exact words or no languages with which one can describe the true essence of *Nibbāna*, but practicing meditation with the proper methods resolves this problem. This study indeed does not attempt to resolve the concept of *Nibbāna* linguistically, at least not completely. Moreover, this study does not attempt to determine whether the concept of *Nibbāna* is eternalism or annihilationism, based on the scholars' interpretations. The primary purpose of this study is to explore the methods that lead one to understand what *Nibbāna* is

theoretically and attain insight wisdom (*vīpassana-ñāṇa*) and the Path and Fruition wisdom (*magga-phala-ñāṇa*) with which one realizes *Nibbāṇa* with the practical basis.

As has been mentioned, the canonical texts provide meditators the understanding of what is *Nibbāṇa* with systematic and practical methods. Since systematic applications of the canonical methods clarify the significance of meditation, meditators come to know that the primary objective of Buddhist meditation, that is to purify the mind. One may understand for oneself what *Nibbāṇa* is by applying the canonical methods, such as (1) *pariyatti* (to study theory), (2) *paṭipatti* (to practice meditation in accordance with the theories), and (3) *paṭiveda* (to attain the realization of *Nibbāṇa*). Theoretical understanding and philosophical understanding of *Nibbāṇa* (that is *pariyatti*) are always incomplete. Consequently, one must practice the path of spiritual realization in order to properly understand the meaning of *Nibbāṇa*. With progress on the path of spiritual realization (*visuddhi-magga*) there is clarification of the theoretical and philosophical opinions. Spiritual liberation here means liberation from defilements, liberation from hindrances, and liberation from wrong view or concept.

In this regard, one can distinguish the differences between the theoretical understanding and the practical realization through practice only. Theoretical understanding contains the concept of "I" which deals with delusion,

hallucination, defilement, or fetters. There may be clinging to oneself, desire to enjoy oneself, hatred of someone for "I", love of someone for "I" and so on. Without forsaking the concept of "I," one will not obtain the purification of mind and may not realize the true essence of *Nibbāna* as well, because the so-called "I" itself is an illusion and an obstruction to the realization of *Nibbāna*. In Buddhist doctrines, *anatta* (no self) theory has been precisely described in order to remove the concept of "I" from oneself. If one wishes to purify the mind and to obtain the experience of true *dharmma*, one must detach from "I," from oneself and attempt to be aware of one's phenomenal experience without involving "I." Since there is no "I" in oneself, mind has a better opportunity to obtain liberation from mental fetters (*samyojanas*). When one realizes the natural process of mind and matter, that is, physical phenomena and mental phenomena, which truly exist in oneself, there is no room for the concept of "I." This means that the so-called "I" no longer exists in oneself at that moment. As a result, there is no such "I," which formerly suffered in pain and discomfort.

Since there is no "I", that is identified as "ego" or "self" or "me" or "mine" and this is realized by meditators through meditation, there is no one who suffers in pain. If there is no "I" who suffers in pain, then one can realize the state of freedom from mental and physical sufferings and peace, known as spiritual liberation. Moreover, *Nibbāna* is described as the end of suffering and the end of *samsāra*. Indeed, one of the functions of *Nibbāna* is to stop the

transferring from death consciousness to rebirth consciousness. This rebirth is due to causes and conditions. In this context, a word like "unconditioned" seems to be the relevant translation for *Nibbāna*. Thus meditation is considered to be extremely important for one to know how consciousness and mental factors are unified and stopped, how the internal and causal process led to its own destruction with the realization of the *dhamma*, and how desires and delusion disappear by purifying the mind.³³¹

When one can experience the significance of purification of mind that is momentarily free from mental suffering or unhappiness due to delusion, one's mind begins to become purified and comes to experience the significance of spiritual liberation, which involves peace and happiness moment to moment. That peacefulness and happiness is the result of the "I" being removed from one's mind. Since the minds of the meditators are overwhelmed by spiritual peace and bliss, the practitioners begin to have hope that the final liberation is not far away any longer; the absolute peace of *Nibbāna* is there. Thus Buddhist meditators apply these methods pragmatically in order to attain the final realization of *Nibbāna*, but do not use merely the philosophical methods through worldly language.

This study, therefore, must give credit to Pāḷi commentators, Buddhist and non-Buddhist interpreters, especially the most wonderful commentator, Ven. Buddhaghosa who systematized the canonical methods for the sake of

meditation. Consequently, his wonderful works, such as the *Visuddhimagga* and the other commentaries, show his intellectual and practical skills in Buddhism so that his works could start a new era for Theravāda Buddhism. Without his works, Theravāda Buddhism perhaps would not survive in a healthy condition nowadays. And his commentaries are like a map that leads one to reach his or her spiritual liberation and final destination.

Now let us sum up the primary purpose of the discussion. This study attempts to analyze the perspectives of Buddhist and non-Buddhist scholars' interpretations of *Nibbāna*. It may be assumed that the work of Buddhist scholars are based on canonical texts through theoretical study and probably practical experience as well, while the work of non-Buddhist scholars is possibly very much based on their intellectual understanding about *Nibbāna* from their doctrinal perspectives of this concept and through the philosophical approach. Thus their interpretations of *Nibbāna* have involved positive and negative statements. However, this study does not attempt to confirm whether or not the interpretations of Buddhist and non-Buddhist scholars are right or wrong. Moreover, this study has not completely covered the entirety of canonical texts, commentaries, and sub-commentaries, because of the large number of volumes of canonical texts and the richness of the sources of Buddhist literature.

It is hoped that this study will assist other academic researchers in Buddhist studies and will help them with a way to apply the canonical methods

for the development of further Buddhist studies. Since it provides some of the benefits of meditation for those who have an interest in Buddhist meditation, they may come to understand at least in rudimentary terms the theoretical, practical and philosophical aspects of the word "*Nibbāna*." Finally it is my contention that although a partial understanding is possible with a philosophical approach, without having personal experience of the meditative practice, one will not truly understand what the word *Nibbāna* really means.

GLOSSARY

abhāva	nothingness
Abhidhamma-piṭaka	Basket of Philosophy
āciṇṇaka-kamma	habitual <i>kamma</i>
adiṭṭha-satta	invisible living being
adhiṭṭhāna	resolution
adhiṭṭhānavasī	mastery in resolving
āhāra	food
akusala-citta	unwholesome-consciousness
amata	deathless
an-upādisesa Nibbāna	biological liberation after cessation of aggregates
anādhika-loka	endless beginning of the world
Anāgāmi	Non-returner, noble being at third stage of the Noble Path
anālaya	detachment
ānāpāna-sati	awareness of inhaling and exhaling
anatta	insubstantiality of phenomena, non-self
aṇḍaja	egg-born beings
anicca	impermanence
animitta	signless
antarakappa	interim aeon
apāya	misery, woeful state, devoid of happiness
appanā-samādhī	absorption, full concentration
appaṇihita	desireless
Arahant	enlightened being, noble being at fourth stage of the Noble Path
arahatta-magga-phala-ñāṇa	supramundane wisdom, enlightenment
ārammaṇa	object
arūpa-bhava	existence of the formless
arūpa-bhūmi	the formless sphere
asaṅkhata	unconditioned, non-conditioned
asaṅkheyyakappa	one incalculable aeon
āsannaka-kamma	death-proximate <i>kamma</i>
āsava	taint, canker
āsavakkhaya	cessation of canker or taint
asesavirāga	complete cessation of craving
asoka	sorrowless
asubha	impure, not beautiful
asura	demon, titan

atakkāvacara	inaccessible to discursive thought
Atta	self, soul
āvajjanavasī	mastery in advertent
avijjā	ignorance
bhaṅga	dissolution
bhava	life, existence
bhāvanā	mental development
bhavanga-citta	life-continuum consciousness
bhaya	danger, fear
bhikkhus	monks
bhūmi	sphere
Bodhisatta	Buddha-to-be
Brahma	mighty God, supreme Soul
buddhicarita	intelligent temperament
carita	personal nature, temperament
cetasika	mental factor, mental state
cetanā	volition
citta	consciousness
citta-visuddhi	purification of mind
cuti-citta	death consciousness
dāna	generosity
deva	heavenly being, god
deva-loka	heavenly world
dhamma-visesa	essence of <i>dhamma</i>
dhutaṅga	ascetic, austere, shaking of defilements
diṭṭha-satta	visible living being
diṭṭhi-visuddhi	purification of view
domanassa	grief, unpleasant mental feeling
dosa	hate
dosacarita	hating temperament
duddasa	hard to see
dugati-bhava	bad existence, suffering world
dukkha	suffering, unpleasant bodily or mentally feeling
dukkha-nirodha-saccā	Truth of Cessation of Suffering
ekaggatā	concentration, one-pointedness of mind
gambhīra	profound
garuka-kamma	weighty <i>kamma</i>
gati	going, transmigration
gati-nimitta	sign of destiny
hetu	root, cause
issā	envy, jealousy

jalābuja	womb-born beings
jarā	decay, aging, old age
jāti	birth
jhāna	absorption, highly developed state of concentration
kāma-bhava	existence of desire
kāma-bhūmi	sphere of desire
kāmacchanda	sensuous desire, sensory desire
kamma	action, volitional energy
kamma-nimitta	sign of <i>kamma</i>
kamma-niyāma	law of <i>kamma</i>
kammaṭṭhāna	meditation, workplace
kaṅkhāvitaraṇa-visuddhi	purification by overcoming doubt
kappa	aeon
kaṭattā-kamma	reserve <i>kamma</i>
kāyagatā-sati	awareness of the bodily actions
khandha	aggregate, group
khaṇikā-samādhī	momentary concentration
khaya	destruction, absolute extinction
kilesā	defilement
kiriya-citta	functional consciousness
kukkucca	remorse, worry
kusala	wholesome
lakkhana	character, characteristic
lobha	greed
lokuttara-citta	supramundane consciousness, transcendental state
lokuttara-magga-citta	Noble Path consciousness
macchariya	avarice
magga	path
magga-phala-ñāṇa	path and fruition knowledge
mahākappa	great aeon
mahā-parinibbāna	final <i>Nibbāna</i> of the Buddha
Mahāyāna	Great Vehicle
māna	conceit
manussa	human beings
maraṇa	death
micchā-dīṭṭhi	wrong view
middha	torpor
moha	delusion
mohacarita	deluded temperament
mutti	liberation
nāma	mind

neyyattha	implicit meaning, inferred meaning
Nibbāna	absolute peace, extinction of, cessation of
nicca	permanent, ageless
niraya	hell
nirodhasamāpatti	attainment of cessation
nītattha	explicit meaning or direct meaning
nīvaraṇa	hindrance
opapātika	accidental, spontaneously born
paccavekkhaṇāvasī	mastery in reviewing
paccupaṭṭhāna	manifestation
padatṭhāna	proximate cause
pañca-ānantariya-kamma	five heinous actions, or crimes
pañihita	determination
paññā	wisdom
paramattha-saccā	ultimate truth
pāramī	perfection
parideva	lamentation
parikkamma-nimitta	preliminary sign
pariyatti	theoretical aspects, leaning the doctrine
paṭicca	dependent on
paṭiccasamuppāda	Dependent Origination
paṭigha	ill will
paṭipatti	practical aspects, practice of meditation
paṭisandhi-citta	rebirth-linking consciousness
paṭiveda	spiritual wisdom, realizing its goal
peta	hungry ghost
phala	fruition
phassa	contact
puthujjana	worldling, ordinary person
rasa	function, taste
rāga	lust
rāgacarita	greedy temperament
rūpa	matter
rūpa-bhava	existence of form
rūpa-bhūmi	sphere of form
sa-upādisesa Nibbāna	psychological liberation from defilement
sabhāva	intrinsic nature
sacca	truth
saddhā	faith
saddhācarita	faithful temperament

Sakadāgāmi	Once-returner, noble person at second stage of Noble Path
saḷāyatana	six sense bases
samādhi	concentration
samāpajjanavasī	mastery in attaining
samatha	tranquility meditation
Sammā-ājīva	Right Livelihood
Sammā-diṭṭhi	Right View
Sammā-kammanta	Right Action
Sammā-samādhi	Right Concentration
Sammā-saṅkappa	Right Intention, right thought
Sammā-sati	Right Mindfulness
Sammā-vācā	Right Speech
Sammā-vāyama	Right Effort
sammuti-saccā	conventional truth
saṁsāra	the cycle of birth and death or endless cycle of existences
saṁsedaja	moisture-born beings
samudaya	desire
samuppāda	arising, origination
saṁyojana	fetter
saṅkhāra	mental formation
saṅkhata	conditioned, compounded
saññā	perception
santi	peace
santi-sukha	happiness without feeling
sassata	eternal
sassata-diṭṭhi	eternity view
sati	mindfulness
sati-paṭṭhāna	four foundations of mindfulness
satta	living being
sīla	morality, virtue
sīla-visuddhi	purification of virtue
sīlabbataparāmāsa	adherence to rules and rituals
soka	sorrow
Sotāpanna	Stream-winner, noble person at first stage of the Noble Path.
sugati bhava	good existence, happy world
sukha	happiness
suññata	void, emptiness
Suttanta-piṭaka	Basket of Doctrines

taṇhā	desire
Theravāda	Way of the Elders, Doctrine of the Elders
thina	sloth
ṭhiti	presence
Ti-piṭaka	Three Baskets
tiricchāna	animals
tuccha	emptiness
uccheda-dīṭṭhi	annihilationism
uddhacca	restlessness
uggaha-nimitta	learning sign
upacāra-samādhi	neighborhood concentration
upādāna	clinging
upāya	methods
upāyāsa	despair
uppāda	arising
utu	temperature, weather
vaṭṭa	round of existence
vedanā	feeling, sensation
vedayita-sukha	happiness with feeling
vicāra	sustained application of mind, discursive thinking
vicikicchā	doubt, skepticism
vimutti	liberation
Vinaya-piṭaka	Basket of Discipline
viññāṇa	consciousness
vipāka	effect, result
vipallāsa	hallucination, perversion
vipassanā	insight meditation
vipassanā-ñāṇa	insight wisdom
virīya	effort
visuddhimagga	path of purification
vitakka	thought, initial application of mind
vitakkacarita	speculative temperament
vīthi	process
vuṭṭhānavasī	mastery in emerging
vyāpāda	ill will
yānika	vehicle

ENDNOTES

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- ¹ Guy Richard Welbon, *The Buddhist Nirvāna and Its Western Interpreters* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1968), 113.
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- ³ Ibid, 277.
- ⁴ Ibid, 280.
- ⁵ Ibid, 289-290.
- ⁶ K. N. Jayatileke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge* (1963; reprint, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publisher, 1998), 333.
- ⁷ Bibhuti S. Yadav (Ph. D., Banaras Hindu University) is Assistant Professor of Religion at Temple University. He has published articles in *Indian Philosophical Journal*.
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- ⁹ Steven Collins, *Nirvāna and Other Buddhist Felicities* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 33, 224.
- ¹⁰ U Pandita Sayādaw, *In This Very Life* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1992), 71-73.
- ¹¹ Hsueh-li Cheng, *Nāgarjuna's Twelve Great Treatise* (Boston: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1982), 21-24.
- ¹² Bhikkhu Bodhi, ed., *A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma* (Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 1993), 258.
- ¹³ *Mahā-vagga Pāḷi, Dīgha-Nikāya* (Rangoon, Burma: Department of Religious Affairs, 1993), 251-252.
- ¹⁴ Maurice Walshe, trans., *The Long Discourses of the Buddha. A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1987), 350.

¹⁵ Hirakawa Akira, *A History of Indian Buddhism: From Sakyamuni to Early Mahāyāna* (1915; reprint, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990), 116.

¹⁶ P. V. Bapat. *2500 Years of Buddhism* (1956; reprint, India: Publications Division, 1994), 89.

¹⁷ Ibid, 76.

¹⁸ Melford E. Spiro, *Buddhism and Society: A Great Tradition and Its Burmese Vicissitudes* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1970), 378-382.

¹⁹ *Subodhalaṅkāra-Ṭīkā* (Rangoon, Burma: Department of Religious Affairs, 1973), 25.

²⁰ This is my own translation based on the related commentaries.

²¹ *Sīlakkhandha-vagga-aṭṭhakathā*. (Rangoon, Burma: Department of Religious Affairs, 1975), 17.

²² Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Saṃyutta Nikāya* Vol. II (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2000), 1844.

²³ Ma-P, Di-N Vol. II, 231.

²⁴ Di-N-NT, 335.

²⁵ Venerable Nyanaponika Thera and Bhikkhu Bodhi *Numerical Discourses of the Buddha: An Anthology of Suttas from the Aṅguttara Nikāya* (New York: Altamira Press, 1999), 130-131.

²⁶ There are different opinions about the origin date for Mahāyāna Buddhism. Some scholars believe that Mahāyāna Buddhism developed after the Second Buddhist Council, while some scholars accept that Mahāyāna Buddhism began to formally emerge in distinction to Theravāda Buddhism after a Third Council. See Akira, 105-116.

²⁷ Cheng, 1-12. Cheng points out that the thought of Nāgārjuna (who lived in the second century A. D. and who was the founder of Mādhyamika Buddhism) can be reckoned as foundational for Mahāyāna Philosophy.

²⁸ Herbert V. Guenther, *Philosophy and Psychology in the Abhidharma* (1957; reprint, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1991), 194.

²⁹ Pure Land Buddhism is a type of Mahāyāna tradition based on the teaching of the Buddha. The later popular Pure Land doctrine was given by the great honorable Shinran Shonin (1173-1262), the founder of the Shin sect of Pure Land Buddhism, which originated in twelfth century Japan. Its popularity comes from its easy form of practice, which can be performed by all people in their daily life. This citation is from Cheng, 11.

³⁰ Ibid, 12.

³¹ Takeuchi Yoshinori, ed., *Buddhist Spirituality: Later China, Korea, Japan, and the Modern World*. Vol. II (New York: Crossroad Press, 1999), 396.

³² *Pāthikavagga-aṭṭhakathā, Dīgha-Nikāya* (Rangoon, Burma: Department of Religious Affairs, 1993), 82.

³³ Ibid, 82.

³⁴ This is my own translation based on the Pāli commentary definitions.

³⁵ Di-N-A, Vol. III, 82-83.

³⁶ Robert Audi, ed., *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 323-324.

³⁷ Donald S. Lopez, Jr., *Buddhist Hermeneutics* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1988), 1-5.

³⁸ Ibid, 5-6.

³⁹ Samuel Enoch Stumpf, *Socrates to Sartre: A History of Philosophy* (New York: McGraw-Hill Publishing Company, 1988), 411.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 414.

⁴¹ Ibid, 415-416.

⁴² Ac-Ab, 25-27.

⁴³ Baddanta Anuroddhā-thera, *Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha-Pāḷi* (Rangoon, Burma: Department of Religious Affairs, 1993), 114.

⁴⁴ Ac-Ab, 260.

⁴⁵ Ashin Janakābhivaṃsa Sayādaw, *Abhidhammattha-Saṅgaha-bhāsā-tīkā* (Rangoon, Burma: Department of Religious Affairs, 1979), 545.

⁴⁶ *Itivuttaka Pāḷi, Khuddaka-Nikāya* (Rangoon, Burma: Department of Religious Affairs, 1972), 221.

⁴⁷ *Khuddakapāṭha Pāḷi, Khuddaka-Nikāya* (Rangoon, Burma: Department of Religious Affairs, 1981), 7.

⁴⁸ Baddanta Sumangalasāmi-thera, *Abhidhammatthavibhāvinī-tīkā* (Rangoon, Burma: Department of Religious Affairs, 1990), 216.

⁴⁹ Ab-B-T, 544.

⁵⁰ Ma-P, Di-N Vol. II, 247, 249.

⁵¹ Di-N-NT, 347-348.

⁵² Baddanta Buddhaghosa-thera, *Mahāvā-aṭṭhakathā, Dīgha-Nikāya* (Rangoon, Burma: Department of Religious Affairs, 1992), 390.

⁵³ Di-N-A Vol. II, 390. The commentary citation is: *Ekameva hi nibbānam. nāmāni panassa sabbasankhatānaṃ nāmapaṭipakkhavasena anekāṇi honti. seyyathidam -- asesavirāgo asesanirodho cāgo paṭinissaggo mutti anālayo rāgakkhayo dosakkhayo mohakkhayo taṇhakkhayo anuppādo appavattam animittam appaṇihitam anāyūhanam appatisandhi anupapatti agati ajātam ajaram abyādhi amataṃ asokaṃ aparidevaṃ anupāyāsaṃ asaṃkilitthan-ti.*

⁵⁴ *Mokho nirodho nibbānaṃ, dīpo taṇhakkhayo param, tānaṃ leṇa-marūpaṇca, santaṃ sacca-manālayam. Asaṅkhataṃ siva-mamataṃ sududdasaṃ, parāyanam saraṇa-manītikaṃ tathā, anāsavaṃ duva-manidassanā-katā, palokitaṃ nipuṇa-manantamakkharam. Dukkhaṃ byābajjhā, vivaṭṭam khema kevalam, apavaggo virāgo ca, paṇīta-maccutaṃ padam. Yogakkhamo pāra-mapi, mutti santi visuddhiyo, vimutya-saṅkhataadhātu, suddhi nibbutiyo siyumaṃ.*

These verses are recorded in Moggallāna-Mahāthera. *Abhidhānappadīpikā* (Rangoon, Burma: Department of Religious Affairs, 1990), 3-4.

⁵⁵ Ab-B-T, 481.

⁵⁶ Ma-P, Di-N, 129.

⁵⁷ Di-N-NT, 271.

⁵⁸ Di-N-NT, 271.

⁵⁹ This is my own translation based on the commentary source.

⁶⁰ Ma-P, Di-N, 129-130.

⁶¹ Jaina Ramjee Singh, "Moksa in Indian Philosophy: A Perspective in Jaina Philosophy and Religion," *www.jainworld.com*, 1-5 [cited 15 September, 2002].

⁶² Baddanta Buddhaghosa-thera, *Dhammapada-aṭṭhakathā* (Rangoon, Burma: Burma Piṭaka Association, 1986), 52-73.

⁶³ *Mahā-vagga Pāli, Vinaya Piṭaka, Khuddaka-Nikāya* (Rangoon, Burma: Department of Religious Affairs, 1972), 50.

⁶⁴ This is my own translation for the Pāli sentence.

⁶⁵ *Khandhavagga-Pāli, Saṃyutta-Nikāya* (Rangoon, Burma: Department of Religious Affairs, 1991), 56.

⁶⁶ Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, 903.

⁶⁷ Baddanta Ñāṇābhivaṃsa. *Sīlakkhandhavagga-abhinava-ṭīkā*. (Rangoon, Burma: Department of Religious Affairs, 1963), 74.

⁶⁸ Baddanta Buddhaghosa-thera, *Sīlakkhandha-vagga (Sumaṅgalavilāsini) aṭṭhakathā* (Rangoon, Burma: Department of Religious Affairs, 1973), 16.

⁶⁹ *Dhammapada-Pāli, Khuddaka-Nikāya* (Rangoon, Burma: Department of Religious Affairs, 1972), 36.

⁷⁰ Ñāṇamoli Thera's translation: *Udānavatthu, Dhammapada Pāḷi*, verses 153-154, Kh-N Vol. I, 36; Vi-P Vol. IV, 481, 482-3.

⁷¹ Di-N Vol. II, 128.

⁷² Di-N-NT, 170.

⁷³ Di-N Vol. III, 31.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 213.

⁷⁵ Sa-N Vol. III, 370-371.

⁷⁶ Sa-N-NT Vol. II, 1846.

⁷⁷ Ac-Ab, 330-331.

⁷⁸ Vi-S, 101.

⁷⁹ *Suttanipāta Pāḷi, Khuddakanikāya* (Rangoon, Burma: Department of Religious Affairs, 1990), 444

⁸⁰ This translation is based on the commentary of the *Suttanipāta Pāḷi*.

⁸¹ *Saḷāyatana-vagga Saṃyutta Pāḷi, Saṃyutta-Nikāya* (Rangoon, Burma: Department of Religious Affairs, 1991), 447.

⁸² Sa-N-NT Vol. II, N, 1294.

⁸³ Ibid, 1294.

⁸⁴ *Patisambhidāmagga Pāḷi, Khuddaka-Nikāya* (Rangoon, Burma: Department of Religious Affairs, 1991), 58.

⁸⁵ Baddanta Anuroddhā-thera, *Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha-Pāḷi* (Rangoon, Burma: Department of Religious Affairs, 1993), 113.

⁸⁶ In the *Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha Pāḷi* and the *Abhidhamma* texts, there are the knowledges of the four supermundane Paths. They are: (1) the realizing of the Path of Stream-Winning (*sotāpatti-magga*), (2) The realizing of the Path of Once-Return (*sakadāgāmi-magga*), (3) The realizing of the Path of Non-Return

(*anāgāmi-magga*), and (4) the realizing of the Path of Holiness (*arahatta-magga*). See Baddanta Nyanatiloka-thera, *Buddhist Dictionary: Manual of Buddhist Terms and Doctrines* (Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 1988), 20.

⁸⁷ Ac-Ab, 258.

⁸⁸ Baddanta Buddhaghosa-thera, *Visuddhimagga-aṭṭhakathā* Vol. II (Rangoon, Burma: Department of Religious Affairs, 1993), 139.

⁸⁹ The citation is the translation of Bhikkhu Nānamoli: *The Path of Purification: Visuddhimagga* (1956; reprint, Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 1991), 514-15.

⁹⁰ Vi-M Vol. II, 139-140.

⁹¹ Vi-M, 515.

⁹² Ibid, 517.

⁹³ Ibid, 516-516.

⁹⁴ N.R.M. Ehara, Soma Thera, and Kheminda Thera, trans. *The Path of Freedom: Vimuttimagga* (1961; reprint, Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 1995), 272. The commentator, Ven. Arahant Upatissa, emphasized his statement quoting from Pāli canonical sources in Sa-N. *Yo tassā yeva taṇhāya asesavirāga-nirodho cāgo paṭinissaggo mutti anālayo. Idaṃ vuccati bhikkhave dukkha-nirodham ariya-saccam* in the *Mahā-vagga Saṃyutta Pāli, Saṃyutta-Nikāya* (Rangoon, Burma: Department of Religious Affairs, 1991), 272.

⁹⁵ Fung Yu-Lan. *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy* (New York: The Free Press, 1976), 251.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 252. The quotation connected to Collected Commentaries to the Parinirvāṇa Sutra, Chuan 1 and Commentary to the Vimalakirti Sutra, Chuan 7.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 253.

⁹⁸ Cheng, 1-9.

⁹⁹ Asanga, *Abhidharmasamuccaya: The Compendium of the Higher Teaching*

(*Philosophy*). Translated by Sara Boin-Webb from the French translation of Walpola Rahula (1971; reprint, Fremont, California: Asian Humanities Press, 2001), xi-xviii.

¹⁰⁰ Cheng, 13.

¹⁰¹ Bibhuti, 452.

¹⁰² Ibid, 463-464.

¹⁰³ Asanga, 139.

¹⁰⁴ Vasubandhu *Abhidharmakosabhāsyam*, Vol I. Translated by Peo M. Pruden from the French translation of Louis de La Vallee Poussin. (1923-1925; reprint, Berkeley, California: Asian Humanities Press, 1988), 280-281.

¹⁰⁵ Collins, 98.

¹⁰⁶ Welbon, 125.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 282.

¹⁰⁸ Collins, 97.

¹⁰⁹ *Mahā-vagga Pāḷi, Vinaya Piṭaka, Khuddaka-Nikāya*, 1.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 1.

¹¹¹ Ac-Ab, 294-395.

¹¹² Ab-S, 134; Ac-Ab, 302.

¹¹³ Ma-P-D, 129.

¹¹⁴ Sa-N Vol. II, 383.

¹¹⁵ Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Connected Discourse of the Buddha*, 1239.

¹¹⁶ Ab-S, 129.

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- ¹¹⁷ K. Sri Dhammānanda, *The Buddhist Concept of Heaven and Hell* (Malaysia: Buddhist Missionary Society, 2000), 1-4.
- ¹¹⁸ Harvey B. Aronson. "The Relationship of the Karmic to Nirvānic in Theravāda Buddhism." *Journal of Religious Ethics* 7 (1979), 28.
- ¹¹⁹ Ac-Ab, 72-73.
- ¹²⁰ Ledi Sayādaw, *The Manuals of Buddhism* (Malaysia: SBVMS Publication, 1994), 188.
- ¹²¹ Ibid, 189.
- ¹²² Di-N-A Vol. I, 306; Sa-N-A Vol. I, 72; An-N-A Vol. I, 74; and It-A, 78.
- ¹²³ Baddanta Nyanatiloka-thera, 147.
- ¹²⁴ Ne-A, 100.
- ¹²⁵ Cheng, 19.
- ¹²⁶ The Table is based on Ab-S, 73-74 and its commentary: Ab-T, 161-164.
- ¹²⁷ Vasubandhu *Abhidharmakosabhāsyam* Vol II, 365-366.
- ¹²⁸ Ledi Sayādaw, *The Manuals of Buddhism*, 7-8.
- ¹²⁹ Sa-N Vol. II, 120.
- ¹³⁰ Ab-S, 68-70; Ab-T, 156-161; Ab-S-N, 241-255.
- ¹³¹ Jotiya Dhirasekera, ed., *Encyclopaedia of Buddhism*, Vol. IV (Sri Lanka: The Department of Government, 1979), 257-259.
- ¹³² Q-Mi, 88-89.
- ¹³³ *Milindapañha Pāli, Khuddaka-Nikāya* (Rangoon, Burma: Department of Religious Affairs, 1991), 146-147; Q-Mi, 88-89.
- ¹³⁴ Di-N Vol. III, 69-70; Di-N-NT, 409-410.

¹³⁵ Di-N Vol. III, 69-70; Di-N-NT, 409-410.

¹³⁶ Sa-N, 389-390; Ac-Ab, 198.

¹³⁷ Ab-B-T, 322-330.

¹³⁸ Vasubandhu, 103.

¹³⁹ *Nidāna-vagga Saṃyutta Pāli, Saṃyutta-Nikāya* (Rangoon, Burma: Department of Religious Affairs, 1991), 387; Sa-N-NT Vol. I, 651.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, 46.

¹⁴¹ Ab-B-T, 321.

¹⁴² Francis P. Xavier, "Creation in Evolution", in *Indian Theological Studies*, Vol. XXXVIII. No.1., 47-54.

¹⁴³ Stephen Hawking, *The Universe in a Nutshell* (New York: Bantam Books, 2001), 79.

¹⁴⁴ Francis P. Xavier, 69.

¹⁴⁵ Ab-B-T, 281-283.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 283-291.

¹⁴⁷ Bhikkhu Nānamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, trans., *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Majjhima Nikāya* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995), 1032.

¹⁴⁸ Ac-Ab, 202.

¹⁴⁹ Ab-B-T, 292.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 292-293.

¹⁵¹ Ma-N-NT, 1029-1033.

¹⁵² Ab-B-T, 292-293.

¹⁵³ Ibid, 294.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, 294-295.

¹⁵⁵ Ac-Ab, 196-197.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, 256.

¹⁵⁷ Ab-B-T, 295-296.

¹⁵⁸ Ab-S, 78-79.

¹⁵⁹ Ac-Ab, 199.

¹⁶⁰ Lal Mani Joshi, *Brahmanism Buddhism and Hinduism* (Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication, 1987), 52-63.

¹⁶¹ Ab-S, 81.

¹⁶² Ibid, 81.

¹⁶³ Ac-Ab, 199.

¹⁶⁴ Ab-S, 81; Ac-Ab, 201-205.

¹⁶⁵ Ac-Ab, 203-204.

¹⁶⁶ Ac-Ab, 203-204.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, 221.

¹⁶⁸ Ab-T, 188.

¹⁶⁹ Ab-S, 89-92.

¹⁷⁰ Kenneth Kramer, *The Sacred Art of Dying: How World Religions Understand Death*. (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), 22.

¹⁷¹ Guru Rinpoche, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead: The Great Liberation through Hearing in the Bardo*. Translated by Francesca Fremantle and Chogyam

Trungpa from the Tibetan. (Boulder, Colorado: Shambhala Publications. Inc., 1975), 11-12.

¹⁷² Kramer, 30-31.

¹⁷³ Ibid, 147.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, 147.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid, 165.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, 160.

¹⁷⁷ John M Cooper. ed., *Plato: Complete Works*. (1984; reprint, Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.), 1997.

¹⁷⁸ Raymond A. Moody, Jr., M.D. *Life after Life: The Investigation of a Phenomenon Survival of Bodily Death* (New York: Bantam Books Publication, 1976), 30.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid, 48, 56, 70.

¹⁸⁰ Raymond A. Moody, Jr., M.D., *Reflection on Life After Life* (New York: Bantam Books Publication, 1978), 15.

¹⁸¹ Shwe Kyin Sayādaw, *Gambhīrāgambhīra Mahānibbata-Dīpanī* (Rangoon, Burma: Department of Religious Affairs, 2000), 173.

¹⁸² Ibid, 173.

¹⁸³ Ledi Sayādaw, *Nibbāna-Dīpanī*. (Rangoon, Burma: Department of Religious Affairs, 1975), 711.

¹⁸⁴ Rinpoche, 2.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid, 3.

¹⁸⁶ Baddanta Dhammapāla-thera, *Visuddhimagga-mahātīkā Vols. II* (Rangoon, Burma Department of Religious Affairs, 1977), 525: *Yadi arūpe nirodham samāpajjeyya. cittacetāsikarnam aññassa ca kassaci abhāvato apaññattiko*

bhaveyya anupādisesāya nibbānadhātuyā parinibbutasadiṣo, Shwe Kyin Sayādaw *Gambhīrāgambhīra Mahānibbuta-Dīpanī-Kyam*, 288.

¹⁸⁷ Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli, trans., *The Path of Purification: Visuddhimagga* (Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 1991), 731-735.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid, 731.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, 739.

¹⁹⁰ Rahula, Walpola. *What the Buddha Taught* (1959; reprint, London: The Gordon Fraser Gallery Ltd., 1978), 35.

¹⁹¹ Baddanta Buddhaghosa-thera, *Sammohavinodanī (Vibhanga) aṭṭhakathā* (Rangoon, Burma: Department of Religious Affairs, 1985), 79.

¹⁹² "Defilements" (*kilesas*), are mind-defiling, unwholesome qualities. There are ten "Defilements," thus called because they are themselves defiled, and because they defile the mental factors associated with mind. They are: (1) Greed (*lobha*), (2) Hate (*dosa*), (3) Delusion (*moha*), (4) Conceit (*māna*), (5) Speculative View (*ditṭhi*), (6) Sceptical Doubt (*vicikicchā*), (7) Mental Torpor (*thina*), (8) Restlessness (*uddhacca*), (9) Shamelessness (*ahirika*), and Lack of Dread or Unconscientiousness (*anottappa*). Nyanatiloka-thera, *Buddhist Dictionary*, 86-87.

¹⁹³ There are eleven types of "Fires" (*aggis*); they are called as "Fire" because their power causes beings to burn as to get great sufferings. They are: (1) Lust (*rāga*), (2) Anger (*dosa*), (3) Delusion (*moha*), (4) Rebirth (*jāti*), Aging (*jarā*), Death (*maraṇa*), Sorrow (*soka*), Lamentation (*parideva*), Physical pain (*dukkha*), Mental pain or grief (*domanassa*), and Despair (*upāyāsa*). Baddanta Buddhaghosa Thera, *Saraṭṭhapakāsanī (Samyutta) aṭṭhakathā*, Vol.II (Rangoon, Burma: Department of Religious Affairs, 1987), 85.

¹⁹⁴ N. K. G. Mendis, ed., *The Questions of King Milinda: An Abridgement of the Milindapañha* (Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 1993), 57.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid, 48.

¹⁹⁶ Q-Mi, 130-31.

¹⁹⁷ *Sīlakkhandha-vagga Pāḷi, Dīgha-Nikāya* (Rangoon, Burma: Department of Religious Affairs, 1993), 213.

¹⁹⁸ Di-N-NT, 179-180.

¹⁹⁹ Ac-ab, 258.

²⁰⁰ G-M-Ni, 144.

²⁰¹ Ibid, 55.

²⁰² Q-Mi, 136.

²⁰³ Ibid, 136-137.

²⁰⁴ Ibid, 137.

²⁰⁵ Baddanta Buddhaghosa-thera. *Dhammasaṅgani-aṭṭhakathā* (Rangoon, Burma: Department of Religious Affairs, 1992), 99.

²⁰⁶ Nyanaponika-thera, trans., *Abhidhamma Studies* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1998), 93.

²⁰⁷ *Parivā Pālī, Vinaya-Piṭaka* (Rangoon, Burma: Department of Religious Affairs, 1995), 263.

²⁰⁸ *Parivā-aṭṭhakathā, Vinaya-Piṭaka* (Rangoon, Burma: Department of Religious Affairs, 1996), 163.

²⁰⁹ G-M-Ni, 48-55.

²¹⁰ Q-Mi, 60,61.

²¹¹ The body of the Dhamma here doesn't mean that it is the essence of the Buddha's body, but it directly refers to the essence of dhamma [nature of a thing or quality]. Thus, Ven. Nāgasena emphasized his statement with the word "For Dhamma."

²¹² Q-Mi, 60.

²¹³ G-M-Ni, 144.

²¹⁴ *Itivuttaka Pāḷi, Khuddaka-Nikāya* (Rangoon, Burma: Department of Religious Affairs, 1972), 221; John D. Ireland, trans., *The Itivuttaka: The Buddha's Sayings*. (Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 1991), 31-32.

The following is the citation of the canonical source:

Dvemā bhikkhave nibbānadhātu. Katama dwe? Saupādisesā ca nibbānadhātu anupādisesā ca nibbānadhātu.

Katamā ca bhikkhave saupādisesā nibbānadhātu. Idha bhikkhave bhikkhu araham hoti khīṇāsavo vusitavā katakaraṇīyo ohitabhāro anuppatto parikkhīṇabhavasamyojano sammadaññāvimutto. tassa tiṭṭhanteva pañcīdriyāni. Yesam bhāhitattā manāpāmanāpaṃ paccaṇubhoti. Sukhadukham paṭisamvediyati. Tassa yo rāgakkhayo dosakkhayo mohakkhayo. Ayaṃ vuccati bhikkhave saupādisesā nibbānadhātu.

Katamā ca bhikkhave anupādisesā nibbānadhātu. Idha bhikkhave bhikkhu araham hoti khīṇāsavo vusitavā katakaraṇīyo ohitabhāro anuppatto parikkhīṇabhavasamyojano sammadaññāvimutto. tassa idheva bhikkhave sabbavedayitāni anabhinanditānisīti bhavissanti. ayaṃ vuccati bhikkhave anupādisesā nibbānadhātu.

²¹⁵ BD, 106.

²¹⁶ Ac-Ab, 260.

²¹⁷ Ledi Sayādaw. *Nibbāna-Dīpanī*, 212.

²¹⁸ Di-M-NT, 85.

²¹⁹ Samuel Enoch Stumpf. *Socrates to Sartre: A History of Philosophy* (New York: McGraw-Hill Publishing Company, 198), 362.

²²⁰ Ni-Di, 714-716.

²²¹ Ibid, 717-724.

²²² Vi-M, 88-91.

²²³ *Anguttara-Pāḷi, Anguttara-Nikāya* Vol. III, (Rangoon, Burma: Department of Religious Affairs, 1994), 246-247. The Pāḷi translation is my own work. The citation is as follows: "Diṭṭhadhamma-nibbānam, Diṭṭhadhamma-nibbānan" ti āvuso vuccati. Kittāvātā nu kho āvuso Diṭṭhadhamma-nibbānam vuttaṃ bhagavatāti. Idhāvuso Bhikkhu vivicceva kāmehi vivicca akusalehi dhammehi

savitakkaṃ savicāraṃ vivekaṃ pītisukhaṃ paṭhamāṃ jhānaṃ upasampajja viharati.

²²⁴ Ni-Di, 728-729.

²²⁵ *Khuddakapāṭha Pāḷi, Khuddaka-Nikāya*, 4.

²²⁶ Ni-Di, 731.

²²⁷ Ni-Di, 733.

²²⁸ Ni-Di, 734, 735.

²²⁹ Q-Mi, 129-130.

²³⁰ Ashin Janakābhivamsa, Sayādaw. *Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha-Bhathātikā* (Rangoon, Burma: Department of Religious Affairs, 1979), 640-641.

²³¹ Vi-M-Tran., 735.

²³² Ni-Di, 706-708.

²³³ Ibid, 706-707.

²³⁴ Welbon, 113.

²³⁵ Ab-S, 128.

²³⁶ Baddanta Buddhaghosa-thera. *Pañcapakarana-aṭṭhakathā* (Rangoon, Burma: Department of Religious Affairs, 1992), 291.

²³⁷ *Kathāvatthu Pāḷi. Abhidhamma Piṭaka* (Rangoon, Burma: Department of Religious Affairs, 1991), 53.

²³⁸ G-M-Ni, 220.

²³⁹ Ka, 53.

²⁴⁰ Ibid, 187.

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- ²⁴¹ Baddanta Buddhaghosa. *Visuddhimagga-tīkā* Vol. I (Rangoon, Burma: Department of Religious Affairs, 1993), 220.
- ²⁴² Baddanta Buddhaghosa-thera. *Mahāvā-aṭṭhakathā, Dīgha-Nikāya* (Rangoon, Burma: Department of Religious Affairs, 1992), 147.
- ²⁴³ G-M-Ni, 53.
- ²⁴⁴ Bhikkhu Buddhadāsa. *Nibbāna Exists in Saṃsāra*, in *Me and Mine* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1989), 141.
- ²⁴⁵ Ibid, 141.
- ²⁴⁶ *Sagāthā-vagga Saṃyutta Pāḷi, Saṃyutta-Nikāya* (Rangoon, Burma: Department of Religious Affairs, 1991), 61.
- ²⁴⁷ Sa-N NT Vol. I., 158.
- ²⁴⁸ *Netti Pāḷi, Khuddaka-Nikāya* (Rangoon, Burma: Department of Religious Affairs, 1985), 172.
- ²⁴⁹ Buddhadāsa, 144.
- ²⁵⁰ G-M-Ni, 133, 128-308. The quotation comes from the commentary, *Mūlapaṇṇāsa-aṭṭhakathā* (310): *Nibbānato hi añño supabhāvantataro vā sujotivantataro vā parisuddhataro vā paṇḍarataro vā natthi*.
- ²⁵¹ Ni-Di, 780-781.
- ²⁵² Ab-T, 640-643.
- ²⁵³ Mahāsi Sayādaw, *Vipassanā-Shu-nee-kyam* Vol. II (Rangoon: Buddhasāsanā-nuggaha Org. Press, 1999), 341.
- ²⁵⁴ Mahāsi Sayādaw, *Nibbānapatisaṃyutta-katha: On the Nature of Nibbāna*. (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: Subang Jaya Buddhist Association, 1992), 59.
- ²⁵⁵ Kuala Lumpur Dhammajīti, Asanga Tilakaratne, and Kapila Abhayawansa. *Recent Researches in Buddhist Studies* (Colombo, Sri Lanka: Y. Karunadasa Felicitation Committee, 1997), 526.

²⁵⁶ BD, 230-231.

²⁵⁷ Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Buddha and His Dhamma: Two Lectures on Buddhism* (Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 1999), 23.

²⁵⁸ Ibid, 9.

²⁵⁹ Kh-N, 319.

²⁶⁰ Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, 32.

²⁶¹ An-N Vol III, 42-43.

²⁶² Nyanaponika-thera and Bhikkhu Bodhi, 204.

²⁶³ According to *Dhammacakkapavattana-Sutta*, the factors of the Noble Eightfold Paths are: right view (*sammā-diṭṭhi*), right intention (*sammā-sankappa*), right speech (*sammā-vācā*), right action (*sammā-kammanta*), right livelihood (*sammā-ājīva*), right effort (*sammā-viriya*), right mindfulness (*sammā-sati*), right concentration (*sammā-samādhi*). Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, 1844.

²⁶⁴ Di-N Vol. III, 131.

²⁶⁵ BD, 36.

²⁶⁶ Di-N Vol. III, 230.

²⁶⁷ Sa-N Vol. II, 12.

²⁶⁸ Sa-N-NT, 863.

²⁶⁹ Ab Vol. I, 1-3, 17-144; Ab-S, 2-38, 95-98, 113.

²⁷⁰ Ibid, 104.

²⁷¹ Mahāsi Sayādaw, *The Progress of Insight* (Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 1978), 4-7.

²⁷² An-N Vol. I, 9.

²⁷³ Nyanaponika-thera and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *Numerical Discourses of the Buddha*, 36.

²⁷⁴ Dhammapada, Kh-N, 13.

²⁷⁵ Ab-S, 146.

²⁷⁶ Ibid, 329.

²⁷⁷ Ab-T, 267.

²⁷⁸ Pat-A Vol. 1, 116.

²⁷⁹ Vi-M-TS, 271.

²⁸⁰ Di-N-A Vol. II, 377.

²⁸¹ Vi-M Vol. I, 82.

²⁸² Vi-M-TS, 86.

²⁸³ Ab, 152, Ac-Ab, 340.

²⁸⁴ Ac-Ab, 340.

²⁸⁵ Pa-Auk Sayādaw. *Mindfulness of Breathing and Four Elements Meditation* (Malaysia: W.A.V.E. Publication, 2002), 13.

²⁸⁶ Ibid, 13.

²⁸⁷ Vi-M, 149-150.

²⁸⁸ Ab-B-T, 664.

²⁸⁹ BD, 204-205.

²⁹⁰ Vi-M Vol. I, 281.

²⁹¹ Vi-M-Tran, 282.

²⁹² Vi-M-T, 342.

²⁹³ The translation of the Pāli phrase is my own work.

²⁹⁴ Di-N Vol. I, 67-68.

²⁹⁵ BD, 230.

²⁹⁶ Di-N-A Vol. II, 348-349.

²⁹⁷ Di-N Vol. II, 231.

²⁹⁸ Di-N-NT, 335.

²⁹⁹ BD, 230-231.

³⁰⁰ Pa-Ni, 82.

³⁰¹ The five precepts, observed by Buddhist laymen, are: abstaining from (1) killing, (2) stealing, (3) unlawful sexual intercourse, (4) lying, and (5) intoxicants. Mahāsi Sayādaw, *The Progress of Insight*, 34.

³⁰² The eight precepts, also known as uposatha precepts, are: abstention from (1) killing, (2) stealing, (3) all sexual intercourse, (4) lying, (5) intoxicants, (6) partaking of solid food and certain liquids after 12 noon, (7a) abstention from dance, song, music, and shows (attendance and performance), (7b) abstention from perfumes, ornaments, etc., (8) luxurious beds. This set of eight precepts is observed by devout Buddhist lay followers on full moon days and on other occasions. Ibid, 34.

³⁰³ Mahāsi Sayādaw, *Practical Insight Meditation: Basic and Progressive Stages* (Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 1991), 6-7.

³⁰⁴ U Pandita Sayādaw, *On the Path to Freedom* (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: Buddhist Wisdom Center, 1995), 152.

³⁰⁵ Ibid, 152.

³⁰⁶ Ab-S, 157.

³⁰⁷ Vi-M Vol. II, 222-311.

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- ³⁰⁸ Mahāsi Sayādaw, *The Progress of Insight*, 38-39.
- ³⁰⁹ Di-N Vol. II, 231.
- ³¹⁰ Ac-Ab, 347.
- ³¹¹ Ibid, 348.
- ³¹² Sa-N Vol. II, 12.
- ³¹³ Vi-M Vol. II, 222-311.
- ³¹⁴ Ac-Ab, 345-346.
- ³¹⁵ Mahāsi Sayādaw, *The Progress of Insight*, 1-26.
- ³¹⁶ Pa-Auk Sayādaw, 82.
- ³¹⁷ An-N Vol. I, 361.
- ³¹⁸ Rina Sircar. *The Psycho-Ethical Aspects of Abhidhamma* (New York: University Press of America, Inc., 1999), 124-125.
- ³¹⁹ Taungpulu Tawya Kabā-Aye Sayādaw. *Mahā Satipatthāna Vipassanā: Insight Meditation* (Rangoon, Burma: Department of Religions Affairs, 1979), 33-34.
- ³²⁰ Sa-N-NT, 1242.
- ³²¹ Mahāsi Sayādaw, *Practical Insight Meditation*, 34.
- ³²² In Pāli canonical texts, there are the two different lists of the ten fetters (*saṃyojanas*). One is according to the *Suttanta* method and the other is according to the *Abhidhamma* method. First, according to the *Suttanta* method, the ten fetters are: (1) sensual lust (*kāmarāga-saṃyojana*), (2) attachment to fine-material existence (*rūparāga-saṃyojana*), (3) attachment to immaterial existence (*arūparāga-saṃyojana*), (4) aversion (*paṭigha-saṃyojana*), (5) conceit (*māna-saṃyojana*), (6) wrong view (*diṭṭhi-saṃyojana*), (7) adherence to rites and rituals or ceremonies (*sīlabbataparāmāsa-saṃyojana*), (8) doubt (*vicikicchā-saṃyojana*), (9) restlessness (*uddhacca-saṃyojana*), and ignorance (*avijjā-saṃyojana*). Second, according to the *abhidhamma* method, the ten *saṃyojanas* (fetters) are: the fetters of (1) sensual lust (*kāmarāga-saṃyojana*), (2) attachment to existence

(*bhavarāga-saṃyojana*), (3) aversion (*paṭigha-saṃyojana*), (4) conceit (*māna-saṃyojana*), (5) wrong view (*dīṭṭhi-saṃyojana*), (6) adherence to rites and rituals or ceremonies (*sīlabbataparāmāsa-saṃyojana*), (7) doubt (*vicikicchā-saṃyojana*), (8) envy (*issā-saṃyojana*), (9) avarice (*macchariya-saṃyojana*), and ignorance (*avijjā-saṃyojana*). Ab-S, 117-118; Ab-As, 268-269.

³²³ Ac-Ab, 359.

³²⁴ Di-N Vol. I, 148-149; Ac-Ab, 358-362; Ab-B-T, 563-564, 718-723.

³²⁵ Ibid, 148-149, 358-362, 563-564.

³²⁶ Ibid, 148-149, 358-362, 563-564.

³²⁷ Ibid, 148-149, 358-362, 563-564.

³²⁸ Ab-S, 117-118, 164-165; Ac-Ab, 358-362.

³²⁹ Mahāsi Sayādaw, *Practical Insight Meditation*, 39.

³³⁰ Q-Mi, 134.

³³¹ U Sīlānanda Sayādaw, *The Four Foundations of Mindfulness* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1990), 156.

³³² Rune E. A Johansson. *The Psychology of Nirvāṇa*. (1969. Reprint, New York: Anchor Books Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1970), 100.

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